

The Honganji: Guardian of the State (1868–1945)

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On your brow, wear imperial law; within the
depths of your heart, treasure Buddha-dharma.

Rennyō 蓮如 (1415–1499)¹
Eighth head priest of the Honganji

In 1868, the leaders of the Meiji restoration revived the Jingikan 神祇官 (Department of Kami Affairs) as part of a move to pattern the government on that of the first (legendary) emperor, Jinmu, and to restore the nation to a polity unifying religious and political affairs (*saisei itchi* 祭政一致).² In the same year, a government edict separated “Shinto” affairs from Buddhist (*shinbutsu bunri* 神仏分離).

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In this study, “Honganji” refers to the sectarian movement as a religious order, the Honganji branch of the Jōdo Shinshū, in contrast to “Hongan-ji,” the headquarters temple of the movement.

¹*Jūsūgo kyōki*, in *Rennyō Shōnin gyōjitsu* (hereafter cited as RSG), INABA 1948, p. 88. Also in *Rennyō Shōnin go-ichidaiki kiki-gaki*, in *Shinshū shōgyō zensho* (hereafter cited as SSZ), Shinshū Shōgyō Zensho Hensanjo 1969–1970, vol. 3, p. 566.

²For a comprehensive survey of historical developments in Japanese religion in the Meiji period, see KISHIMOTO 1969, parts 1 and 2. Also see MURAOKA 1964, chaps. 6 and 7. Particularly helpful in analyzing Shinto as religion and ideology in relation to Japan’s cultural tradition is KITAGAWA 1988, pp. 227–45. Kitagawa traces the meaning of the term *saisei-itchi* in the history of Japanese thought in 1987, pp. 117–26.

In effect, Buddhism was disestablished in favor of a newly-created State Shinto: Buddhist rituals at Shinto shrines and at official state functions were banned, Buddhist images were burned, temples stood empty, and perhaps most far-reaching, temple estates were confiscated, resulting in the loss of an economic base. Such a discriminatory policy directed at Buddhists was virtually unprecedented in Japanese history; it ran counter to the ancient tradition of mutual tolerance of religious entities enunciated theoretically in terms of the local kami as manifestations of an underlying Buddhist reality (*honji suijaku* 本地垂迹).

Compounding the shock to Buddhists in early Meiji was the fact that their institutions had served the state diligently and to great effect throughout the Tokugawa period (1600–1868); far from harboring ill-will towards those who ruled, Buddhist officials had sought vigorously to guard against all external threats, including that of the foreign religion introduced by Europeans in the sixteenth century—Christianity. But now, suddenly, Buddhists found themselves abandoned by the state and subject to severe persecution by a popular and militant but unofficial movement for eradication of the influence of Buddhist institutions (*haibutsu kishaku* 廃仏毀釈). A further threat was the reappearance of Christianity as the spiritual base for the advanced learning and military power of modern Western nation-states (KISHIMOTO 1969; MURAKAMI 1980, pp. 33–40).

The Buddhists' initial response, as might be expected, was to seek at all costs to reestablish firm ties to the state by attesting to their loyalty to the newly-restored imperial system and by underscoring the practical benefits Buddhist thought and practice might provide the nation in meeting the renewed challenges—martial, political, technological, spiritual—from the West. And, secondly, with the ending of the active persecution of Christians in early Meiji, Buddhists set about elaborating an apologetic designed to point up the inadequacies of Christian teachings for a modern Japan. Outstanding in this regard were the philosophical writings of Inoue Enryō (1858–1919) in defense of Buddha-dharma. In due course, vigorous efforts at Buddhist reform were also to unfold: advocacy by Shimaji Mokurai (1838–1911) of a separation of religion and state; approaches by Fukuda Gyōkai (1806–1888), Shaku Unshō (1827–1909), Murakami Senshō (1851–1929), and Kiyozawa Manshi (1863–1903) to the cultivation of a deeper spiritual life; the social criticism of the “New Buddhism” movement; and extraordinary achievements in the field

of Buddhist scholarship. A balanced evaluation of the degree of success of efforts at Buddhist reform is not possible here; IENAGA Saburō has, however, offered a challenging analysis of the difficulty for Buddhist institutions in carrying through deep structural changes in patterns of thought and practice during Japan's modern period (1961).

In creating State Shinto to be the spiritual foundation and source of legitimization for imperial rule, leaders of the Meiji restoration were, in effect, initiating a major reconceptualization of Japanese religious life. In response to Western concepts of religious freedom and separation of church and state, Buddhism, Christianity, and eventually sectarian Shinto came to be designated as "religions," while State Shinto—not so designated—was to become an essential constituent of the government administration of a modern nation-state. This unique position of State Shinto was to be maintained for some seventy years until 1945, when the end of the Second World War brought the disestablishment of State Shinto and the realization of guarantees of religious freedom under a new constitution.³ Granted the complexities of interpreting the Western concept of "religion" within the Japanese tradition, the precise relationship between religious institutions and state continues to be an issue of extreme sensitivity in contemporary Japan.⁴ The post-war constitution and official government policies do not appear to fully reflect certain deeply-held Japanese notions of what that relationship ought to be.

³KITAGAWA notes that since State Shinto was not considered a religion, "[it] had great latitude in utilizing the national and local governments, the public educational system, and the army and navy to propagate the Shintō version of ancestor-worship, the emperor cult, and patriotic morality" (1988, p. 241).

⁴MCMULLIN (1989) identifies four issues he sees in dire need of redress. At least two of these issues, the relation between Buddhism and Shinto and the relation between religion and politics, pertain directly to this study. As to the latter relationship, he argues that "there was no politics-versus-religion dichotomy in pre-modern Japanese societies: all notions about authority were politico-religious. Indeed, in these societies, religion and politics were so commingled that the very use of the terms 'religion' and 'politics' in reference to them causes an interpretive splitting of them" (p. 15). McMullin's point is well taken, as is his discussion of historiographical issues, including the propriety of using the Western concept of "religion" in the Japanese instance (pp. 24–25). It was Wilfred Cantwell Smith who alerted many in the academic community to the inadequacy of the concept "religion" for the study of the religious life of humankind (1962). Certainly, as Smith has argued, the adjectival forms may be more helpful than the nominal, and this may well hold in the Japanese instance for that reality generally designated by the terms "religion" or "politics."

This essay presents a study of the Jōdo Shinshū, especially the Nishi Honganji branch, as it sought to define its relationship to the state at two critical moments in modern Japanese history. First, we examine the contents of a major Shinshū document, Kōnyo's "Testament" (*Kōnyo Shōnin go-ikun go-shōsoku* 広如上人御遺訓御消息), the final message of the twentieth head priest, Kōnyo (d. 1871), to members of the Honganji, as recorded by his son, Myōnyo (d. 1903), the twenty-first head priest. The document, issued at a moment of institutional and national crisis in early Meiji, introduced the concept of the transcendent and the mundane as two truths (*shinzoku nitai* 真俗二諦) as the dharma-principle defining the proper relationship of members of the Honganji to the state. Second, in examining an incident in 1940, when significant phrases in the Shinshū scriptures were censored for public use and even erased from the texts in question, we consider how the concept *shinzoku nitai* may have served as a religious symbol to sacralize the Honganji's participation as a Buddhist institution in modern Japanese history.⁵ The focus on religious and ideological concepts and on exegesis of key Shinshū documents and texts illuminates a pervasive theme in Japanese civilization—that of the intrinsic difficulty for Japanese society in general and the Shinshū in particular in developing categories for differentiating between the state and religious authority. The concept of the transcendent and the mundane as two truths appears to have served the Honganji in modern times in ways analogous to those in which concepts such as the unity of religious and political affairs and the mutual tolerance of the kami and buddhas have served Japanese civilization since the very formation of a state and the early encounter with the Buddhist tradition.

⁵It is easy to overlook the dynamic quality of another person's religious symbols; this is particularly the case when the symbols are those of a tradition other than one's own. The notion of symbol implicit here is close to the personalist sense discussed in SMITH 1974, vol. 1, pp. 498–500. Smith sees as virtually a universal phenomenon people's ability "to designate some item from within the visible world and to sacralize it in such a way that it becomes then for them the symbol or locus of the invisible, the transcendent" (p. 498). He notes that different groups choose a great variety of different things, including concepts, to serve as religious symbols, some of which are more successful than others.

Smith develops his thinking further in identifying symbols, not only at the first and second levels, but also at zero level—"higher than the first level, and, indeed, not recognized by the devout as a 'symbol' at all" (1981, p. 95). Religious symbols such as "Jōdo Shinshū" and "Honganji," at work in the lives of devout Shinshū adherents, may be examples of symbols at zero level for some participants in certain contexts.

Meiji Restoration

Kōnyo, the twentieth head priest of the Honganji in direct succession to Shinran (1172–1263) according to the Nishi Honganji lineage, died on Meiji 4 (1871).8.19, at age seventy-seven. His parting message, referred to here as his “Testament,” was officially promulgated in the same year, at the peak of the anti-Buddhist movement noted above. In this document, he seeks to define the proper response of members of his community to the crisis facing them as obedient members of the Honganji and as loyal citizens of a nation seeking to maintain its autonomy in the face of pressures from the Western powers.

Kōnyo’s “Testament,” in fewer than one thousand ideographs in Japanese, formally introduced to the Nishi Honganji order the dharma-principle of the transcendent and the mundane as two truths, a principle held to have antecedents in Buddhist tradition in general and in the Shinshū in particular. In explaining and legitimizing this carefully-wrought religious symbol, Kōnyo quotes passages from the *Larger Sūtra* (*Daimuryōjukyō* 大無量寿經); from a collection of Shinran’s letters, *Goshōsokushū* 御消息集; from Rennyō’s letters, *Ofumi* 御文 or *Gobunshō* 御文章; and from the memoir, *Rennyō Shōnin go-ichidaiki kikigaki* 蓮如上人御一代記聞書. The document rings with near-parental concern for the members of his community; it draws on elements of Buddhist and neo-Confucian thought as well as on Shinshū doctrine in directing them to be loyal and obedient subjects of the emperor, who is recognized as the ultimate head of a familial state. The complete text follows:

From the spring of Bunsei 10 [1827], when I became custodian of the Ryūkoku temple [Hongan-ji], until now, I have taught for over forty years, deviating in no way from our sect’s dharma-principles inherited from the previous master, and following the way of teaching of generation after generation of incumbents. Having already passed seventy, I have been unwell since last year and am unable to move about as I would like. Morning and evening I am grieved that, as a matter of course, it will become difficult for me to guide others in the way.

Also, the heat this summer was unusually intense. An old man, I am becoming weaker day by day and think that within the year I will have accomplished my long-cherished desire to be born in the Pure Land. Feeling that, at the least, the well-being

of like-minded followers should be the hallmark of my longevity, I have had my successor [Myōnyo] take his brush in hand and write down what I say; you should listen very carefully.

Of all those born in this imperial land, there is no one who has not received the emperor's benevolence. These days especially, he labors from morning to night in his deliberations in administering the just government of the restoration, maintaining order among the many people within [the country], and standing firm against all foreign countries; is there then anyone, priest or lay, who would not support the imperial reign and enhance its power? Moreover, as the spread of Buddha-dharma is wholly dependent on the patronage of the emperor and his ministers, how can those who trust in Buddha-dharma disregard the decrees of imperial law?

Accordingly, it has been long-since established in our sect that one should "take imperial law as fundamental; take humanity and justice as foremost,"⁶ revere the kami, and uphold morality. In other words, if, through the [thirty-third] Vow's benefit of touching beings with light and making them gentle-hearted,⁷ a person becomes one who "reveres the virtues, cultivates compassion, and endeavors in courtesy and humility, then surely he conforms to the [Buddha's] golden words, "There is harmony everywhere, and the sun and moon are pure and bright" (*Larger Sūtra*, SSZ 1:41), and return a small part of the emperor's benevolence.

Hence our founding master taught that "we should desire peace in the world and the spread of Buddha-dharma" (*Shinran Shōnin go-shōsokushu*, SSZ 2:697). Given that, it is deplorable that [some people] are confused and think that if they just believe in Buddhist teachings, they can let mundane teachings be as they may. [Rennyō], the restorer of the tradition (*chūkō shōnin* 中興上人)⁸ taught in regard to this, "On your brow, wear imperial law (*ōbō* 王法); within the depths of your heart, treasure Buddha-dharma (*buppō* 仏法)."⁹

Buddha-dharma is the single truth of the Other Power of the

⁶The phrase is Rennyō's; it is rendered in slightly variant readings in several of his letters. See *Rennyō Shōnin ibun*, hereafter cited as RSI (INABA 1983), p. 256 (#86, dated Bunmei 9 [1477].3); 259 (#86/3:12, dated Bunmei 8 [1476].1.27).

⁷The thirty-third Vow is one of the forty-eight enumerated in the *Larger Sūtra*; SSZ 1:11.

⁸Literally, "restorer [of the tradition] midway in its course." The first instance of the use of this epithet to come to our notice is in a Shinshū document dated Kansei 11 (1799).11.25, written by Honnyō, the nineteenth head priest in the Nishi Honganji lineage. See SSZ 5:766–67.

⁹*Jūsūgo kyōki*, RSG, 88; SSZ 2:566. Neil McMULLIN, in his studies of pre-modern Japanese Buddhism, discusses the changing relationship between *ōbō* and *buppō* in medieval Japanese history (1989, pp. 14–15; also see 1984).

Primal Vow (*hongan* 本願). As you have heard in the past, a person must first of all realize deeply that he is an evil, worthless being and discard the sundry practices and disciplines and the doubting mind of self-power; and in the single thought-moment in which he single-heartedly and steadfastly entrusts himself to Amida Tathāgata to save him, [bringing him to buddhahood] in the afterlife,¹⁰ Amida unfailingly embraces that follower and will not discard him, and it is settled that he will be born in the Pure Land. In the recollection of this joy, even in hurried moments or in time of danger, rejoice in the Buddha's benevolence. Whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, say the *nenbutsu*, and you will truly continue in the dharma-principle.

My hope is that our sect's priests and lay people will firmly grasp the correct meaning of what has been transmitted, as stated above; that they will not err in regard to the dharma-principle of the transcendent and the mundane as two truths; that in this life they will be loyal subjects of the empire and reciprocate the unlimited imperial benevolence; and that in the life to come, they will attain birth in the [Pure Land in the] west and escape eternal suffering.¹¹ If, to this end, one makes harmony fundamental, observes one's own discipline, and guides others, there is finally no better way to be bathed in the founder's dharma-stream.

Truly, because the well-being of [our sect's] devotees is my long-cherished desire, it is my request that you regard this letter as my legacy and take careful note [of its contents].

With respect.

The fourth year of Meiji [1871],
the end of early autumn.

The preceding letter is the final message of the former head priest; it states the sectarian doctrine, inherited from our founder, of the excellent principle of the transcendent and the mundane as two truths. Those who belong to this sect should take these instructions as fundamental; outwardly they should carefully follow the government's ordinances, and inwardly they must bear in mind what is necessary for salvation. This is what is essential.

Myōnyo, disciple of Śākyamuni,
Ryūkokū Temple Affairs.¹²

¹⁰A phrase which in slightly variant readings occurs frequently in Rennyō's letters; see RSI, 380 (#127); 436 (#151); 455 (#162); 464 (#168).

¹¹A dualist pattern sharply contrasting this life and the afterlife may be seen in the structure of Rennyō's thought.

¹²For text, see SSZ 5:777–78. See also FUTABA 1971, pp. 352–54.

This document, following Kōnyo's forty years of service as head priest of the Honganji, is, in effect, his last will and testament. He speaks as the twentieth in lineal descent, in terms of both dharma-lineage (*hōmyaku* 法脈) and blood lineage (*ketchimyaku* 血脈), from Shinran, the founder. Failing in health, weakened after a summer's heat, and grieving over the crises facing his community, he urges members of the Honganji to be attentive to the dharma-principle relating the transcendent and the mundane.¹³

Kōnyo begins the body of the letter by noting that early Meiji Japan is a land under benevolent imperial rule. Implicitly, he endorses the restoration leaders' aim of unifying religious and political affairs, returning to a pattern characteristic of the ancient Japanese state as a means of promoting harmony among the populace in face of pressures from abroad. He urges a personal response to the emperor's efforts: "He labors from morning to night in his deliberations; is there then anyone, clerical or lay, who would not support the imperial reign and enhance its power?" Such support is tantamount to support of Buddha-dharma, which is itself dependent on the patronage of the emperor and his ministers.

Kōnyo turns next to the fundamental issue for Honganji members subject to the anti-Buddhist movement, which enjoyed the unofficial support, or, at the least, the passive acquiescence of the governing administration. That issue concerned the proper relationship of the Honganji to the state in modern Japan. Drawing on a series of quotations from the Shinshū scriptures, Kōnyo seeks to legitimize and buttress his presentation of the dharma-principle of the transcendent and the mundane as two truths, giving it the patina of inheritance and tradition. In quoting Rennyō's injunction to "take imperial law as fundamental; take humanity and justice as foremost," Kōnyo strengthens his own directive that those who trust in Buddha-dharma are to support the wishes of the emperor and his ministers. Reverence for the kami and respect for morality appear to be identified with taking imperial law as fundamental.

... if, through the [thirty-third] Vow's benefit of touching beings with light and making them gentle-hearted, a person becomes one who "reveres the virtues, cultivates compassion, and endeavors in courtesy and humility," then he will surely conform to the

¹³This document resonates in style and tone with letters written by Rennyō during his last summer, when he was in failing health. See RSI, 427-435 (#147, #148, #149, and #150).

[Buddha's] golden words, "There is harmony in the world, and the sun and moon are pure and bright," and return a small part of the emperor's benevolence.

Here, Rennyo's advocacy of imperial law—or, as he understood the matter, the laws of the state—as fundamental and humanity and justice as foremost is, in turn, supported by phrases from the *Larger Sūtra*. In short, those touched by Amida's light will be people of virtue and compassion, both respectful of others and humble themselves—surely loyal and obedient members of the Honganji, responsive to the emperor's benevolence. Gratitude for the blessings of Amida's Primal Vow is translated into gratitude to the emperor. The harmony of such an imperial state reflects the purity and brightness of the natural order.

We should desire peace in the world and the spread of Buddha-dharma.

This passage, from Shinran's *Goshōsokushō*, appears in a letter to Shōshinbō, a follower living in the Kantō at a time in which the nascent Shinshū community appeared to be in conflict with the governing administration in Kamakura. The citation is a rebuke to those who are "confused" or who espouse antinomian tendencies by disregarding social norms; Kōnyo implies that there should be no conflict or tension between religious community and state authority. Indeed, Shinran's injunction to say the nenbutsu for the good of the imperial court (*Goshōsokushō*, SSZ 2:697) and for the nation is taken to mean that Honganji members are to assent positively to existing social norms. Kōnyo underscores this crucial point in quoting a sentence attributed to Rennyo:

On your brow, wear imperial law; within the depths of your heart, treasure Buddha-dharma.

Rennyo here identifies two truths. First is the mundane, the outer or public realm affirmative of imperial law and existing social norms. Second is the transcendent, the inwardly-known truth of Buddha-dharma. Kōnyo's interpretation is that these two truths are complementary: Honganji members fulfill their obligations to imperial law through loyalty and obedience to the emperor, and to Buddha-dharma through inner piety and devotion to Amida. Outer and inner truths, the mundane and the transcendent, mutually support one another.

. . . In the single thought-moment in which [a person] single-heartedly and steadfastly entrusts himself to Amida Tathāgata to save him, [bringing him to buddhahood] in the afterlife, Amida unfailingly embraces that follower and will not discard him, and it is settled that he will be born in the Pure Land.

Kōnyo continues by explicating Buddha-dharma in terms of orthodox Shinshū thought as set forth in Rennyo's letters, focussing finally on the saying of Amida's Name. People are recognized as utterly helpless to effect their own salvation; they are absolutely dependent on Amida for escape from suffering and birth in the Pure Land in the afterlife. Given this incapacity for good through self-effort, Shinshū adherents are to say the nenbutsu solely in thanksgiving for Amida's benevolence. Secure in the assurance of birth in the Pure Land in the afterlife, it is then the positive duty of Honganji members to be loyal citizens and to gratefully repay the emperor's benevolence. To inherit the founder's dharma-stream, it is essential to make no mistake as to the correct meaning of the dharma-principle of the transcendent and the mundane as complementary truths.

In Kōnyo's "Testament," we witness the birth of a powerful religious symbol which, in large measure, was to shape the Honganji's responses to the crises of modern Japanese history. *Shinzoku nitai* as dharma-principle touches on the most fundamental issue for religious institutions in modern Japan until the end of the Second World War—the proper relation between that institution and the state, and, more specifically in the Shinshū, the proper response of Honganji members to Amida in relation to the emperor.

Imperial Japan

As noted in the opening section of this essay, the Jingikan in the Meiji era had sought to create and establish a state-centered Shinto as the source of spiritual authority for an imperial state. It soon became evident that such an exclusivist policy would not work for a modern nation-state; the policy was offensive not only to Japanese Buddhists and to traditional syncretistic attitudes characteristic of a majority of Japanese, but also to foreign nations pressing for the opening of Japan. In 1871, the Jingishō 神祇省 (Ministry of Shinto Affairs), which had replaced the Jingikan, was abolished, and the government quickly established the Kyōbushō 教部省 (Ministry of Religion and Education). In 1872, the new Department promulgated

three guiding principles: (1) respect for the kami and love of country; (2) propagation of heavenly reason and the way of humanity; and (3) reverence for the emperor and obedience to his authority (SHIGARAKI 1977, p. 227; KISHIMOTO 1969, pp. 69–70).

We examine now several developments relating to the Nishi Honganji's handling of scripture, culminating in the issuance on April 5, 1940, of a document entitled *Shōgyō no haidoku narabi ni inyō no kokoroe* 聖教の拝読ならびに引用の心得, which gives detailed instructions on the use of scriptural readings and quotations by members of the Honganji.

As early as the summer of 1871, Shimaji Mokurai, representing the Nishi Honganji, had petitioned the government to establish a Department of Religion and Education. The Honganji, armed with the dharma-principle of the transcendent and mundane as two truths, was in a most favorable position to forge a partnership with the imperial state in promoting the three guiding principles listed above. At about that time, in an effort to underscore the Honganji's depth of commitment to such a partnership, a Shinshū scholar, Mizuhara Kōen, proposed that a phrase of four ideographs judged to be a disrespectful reference to the emperor and his retainers in the epilogue of Shinran's major systematic treatise, *Kyōgyōshinshō*, be replaced by asterisks. He recommended that the same apply to a sentence in a biography of Shinran, *Godenshō* 御伝鈔, by his great-grandson Kakunyo (1270–1351), which described a commoner's indifference to ceremonial rules and disrespect to the kami as he made his way to the Kumano Shrine (SHIGARAKI 1977, p. 228).

The epilogue to *Kyōgyōshinshō*, in which the four ideographs appear, is a rare autobiographical statement in which Shinran notes the historical reasons for his exile as a disciple of Hōnen (1133–1212). He points out that the emperor (*shujō* 主上) and his retainers (*shinka* 臣下), in opposing nenbutsu teachings, were responsible for improprieties in their investigation of charges against Hōnen and his disciples: for indiscriminate death sentences for some of them; for the deprivation of priesthood for others, including Shinran, and for their exile under criminal names. The controversial passage reads:

The emperor (*shujō*) and his retainers (*shinka*) opposed the dharma and were at variance with [principles of] justice; they harbored anger and resentment [against the nenbutsu teachings]. Because of this Master Genkū [Hōnen], the great promulgator of the true

teachings, and his followers were, without consideration of their crimes, arbitrarily condemned to death or deprived of their priesthood, given [secular] names, and sentenced to distant banishment. I am one of those. Hence I am neither a monk nor of the world. For this reason I took the name "Toku" 秃. Master Genkū and his disciples were banished [separately] to various remote provinces and spent five years in exile.¹⁴

Shinran's statement is substantiated later in the text by an indication that during the reign (1210–1221) of the succeeding emperor, Sado-no-In (Juntoku), Hōnen was pardoned by imperial order.

In 1886, Nishi Honganji promulgated a new set of sectarian principles. The office of abbot (*monshu* 門主) was established at the head of a highly centralized Honganji order. The second principle in the statement, clearly shaped by Rennyo's thought, reads as follows:

According to the teaching of our sect, "transcendent truth" [*shintai*] is to hear and entrust ourselves to the Buddha's name and to say the name in gratitude for the working of great compassion; "mundane truth" [*zokutai*] is "to live humanely and to obey the imperial law." Thus, if we are people who dwell in a state of Other-Power faith [*anjin* 安心] and strive to return the benevolence [shown us by society], then we manifest the excellent principle of the mutual support of the two truths.¹⁵

Threads of a partnership between the Honganji and the imperial state were woven into the very fabric of a modern religious institution; the concept of the transcendent and the mundane as two truths was the loom essential to that process.

In June 1933, that continuing partnership was tested by an incident in Osaka. An article entitled *Shinkō ōfuku no sho* 信仰往復の書 appeared in a Nishi Honganji-related publication, *Ichimi* 一味, containing the phrase "the great compassion of Amida's command" (*chokumei* 勅命). The editor was called before the Osaka special police and ordered to make written apology for the disrespect to the emperor evidenced by the use of the word "command" in relation to Amida. Subsequently, a representative of the Honganji

¹⁴*Kyōgyōshinshō*, SSZ 2:201–202. For an English translation which renders the four controversial ideographs "lords and vassals," see Ryukoku Translation Center 1966, p. 206. "Distant banishment" was the most severe banishment possible under the *ritsurō* code.

¹⁵Quoted in SHIGARAKI 1981, p. 44. This statement is the basis for a theory of *shinzoku nitai* found in Ryūkyō Daigaku 1978, pp. 169–70.

made a request to the Ministry of Education for an explanation of the police action; the government official listened without offering any explanation for such a severe act of censorship (SHIGARAKI 1977, p. 228).

By 1933, Japan was well along the road towards becoming a totalitarian state: the Manchurian incident took place in 1931 and the Shanghai incident in 1932; in the following year the proletarian novelist Kobayashi Takiji (1903–1933) was beaten to death by secret police in Tokyo, and Takigawa Yukitoki (1891–1962) was forced to give up his academic post at Kyoto Imperial University. In 1936, against a background of increasing repression, the Honganji published a revised version of the scriptures, *Kaitei shinshū seiten* 改訂真宗聖典. Among the revisions is the insertion of the genitive particle の (*no*) in that most sensitive phrase, *shujō shinka*, used by Shinran in *Kyōgyōshinshō*. The revised version reads “retainers of the emperor” (*shujō no shinka* 主上の臣下) rather than “the emperor and his retainers” (SHIGARAKI 1977, p. 228).

Censorship in the name of absolutizing the role of the emperor reached a new level of intensity in 1939. The minister of education, Araki Sadao (1877–1966), charged that *Shinshū yōgi* 真宗要義, a text used in the department of Shinshū studies at Ryūkyō University, included materials disrespectful to the imperial office. The terms *chokumei*, *kyōchoku* 教勅, and *butchoku* 仏勅, significant scriptural concepts in Shinshū thought, were prohibited from use in such a context. After the appropriate revisions were made, the university was allowed to continue to use the text for instruction (SHIGARAKI 1977, pp. 229–30).

The above events strengthened even further the partnership between the Honganji and the state. The two existed side by side as separate entities representing two truths, the former as a religious body symbolic of the transcendent, the latter as a political (in theory at least, not a religious) entity representing the mundane. Working together as partners in mutual harmony, however, they increasingly constituted an organic whole. Thus the concept *shinzoku nitai* as a religious symbol, at least in theory, allowed for a differentiation between the Honganji and the state, yet seeing them as complementary truths. It would appear that, in practice, the national polity (*kokutai* 国体) was to subsume, eventually, categories for both the transcendent and the mundane.

On April 5, 1940, officials of the Nishi Honganji issued a com-

prehensive document instructing its members as to what was proper in reading and quoting scripture (SHIGARAKI 1977, p. 217). This set of instructions called attention to passages in Shinran's *Kyōgyōshinshō*, *Kōsō wasan*, *Shōzōmatsu wasan*, and other writings; Kakunyo's *Godenshō*; and Rennyo's letters. In all, some fifty-three items were identified which might be construed as lacking in respect or reverence for the emperor and the imperial state. Detailed instructions were given as to the proper reading of scripture and its quotation or citation in sermons and writings. In addition, a number of phrases were to be deleted from the texts and, in effect, ruled out of the Shinshū scriptural canon. A Shinshū scholar, writing in the 1970's, comments that the reason for the officials' action was "to express loyalty to the imperial state, recognizing that Shinshū scriptures contradicted the principle of the emperor's divinity [*tennō shinsei* 天皇神聖] and that portions of scripture were incompatible with the Japanese concept of national polity" (SHIGARAKI 1977, p. 217).

The charges Shinran made in the epilogue of *Kyōgyōshinshō* against imperial authority in thirteenth-century Japan became an intolerable burden and source of embarrassment for the Honganji amidst the hysteria of thought-control in 1940. Officials of the Nishi Honganji decided to proscribe even more drastically portions of scripture which even hinted at offense to the imperial system. For example, the entire sentence, "The emperor and his retainers opposed the dharma and were at variance with [principles of justice]; they became angry and hardened their resentment [against the nenbutsu teaching]," was forbidden to be used in services or in quotation in sermons or writings. Blank spaces were to be left in whatever text was involved.¹⁶ A legacy of this prohibition carried over even in postwar editions of the Shinshū scriptures. In a 1967 edition of the volume of scriptures containing Shinran's works, there are blank spaces for the two ideographs 主上 (*shu-jō*); in a 1977 edition, the ideographs are back in place.¹⁷

There are further examples of scriptural items in conflict with the imperial state ideology in 1940:

- In *Kyōgyōshinshō*, when the term *chokumei* appears in the text, as in "to take refuge is the command (*chokumei*) of the Primal Vow calling to and summoning us" (SHIGARAKI 1977, pp. 218–

¹⁶SHIGARAKI 1977, p. 218.

¹⁷Compare 1967 edition, SSZ 2:201, and 1977 edition, SSZ 2:201.

19; see SSZ 2:22), the reading specified for the term was *onmei* 恩命 rather than *chokumei*. *Chokumei* was reserved for exclusive use in reference to imperial commands symbolic of the emperor's divinity. In another of Shinran's texts, *Jōdo monrui jushō*, the Tathāgata's *kyōchoku* was to be read *kyōmei* 教命.

- A passage from the Mahāyāna text, *Bosatsu kaikyō*, quoted in the sixth chapter of *Kyōgyōshinshō*, was proscribed; the text enjoins monks not to bow before kings or parents (SHIGARAKI 1977, p. 218; see SSZ 2:191–92). What could possibly be more offensive to State Shinto or Confucian sensibilities?
- When reference is made to an emperor in *Kyōgyōshinshō* or *Godenshō*, a special honorific was to be used. The reading “*go-Sado-no-in*” became “*goshitatematsuru-Sado-no-in*” (SHIGARAKI 1977, p. 218; see SSZ 2:202). In *Kyōgyōshinshō* and *Godenshō*, Shinran's phrase, “without proper consideration of their crimes,” was proscribed (SHIGARAKI 1977, p. 218; see SSZ 2:201).
- The chapters in *Godenshō* relating Shinran's vision in the Rikkaku-dō and sequences which portray the kami of shrines at Hakone and Kumano in anything less than the absolutist terms of State Shinto were proscribed (SHIGARAKI 1977, p. 219; see SSZ 3:640–41; 650–53). A passage in *Godenshō*, in which Shōtoku Taishi prostrates himself before Shinran, was deleted (SHIGARAKI 1977, p. 219; see SSZ 3:641–42).
- Certain of Shinran's hymns were not to be read. Two from his *Kōsō wasan*:

Genkū was manifested as [the bodhisattva] Scishi;
at times he was revealed to be Amida.
Emperors and many ministers revered him;
people of the capital and of the countryside paid him honor.

A retired emperor during Jōkyū
took refuge in Master Genkū;
monks and scholars alike
entered equally into the true teaching.¹⁸

- One from *Shōzōmatsu wasan*:

World-savior Kannon, the great bodhisattva,
manifested himself as Prince Shōtoku;

¹⁸SHIGARAKI 1977, p. 219; see SSZ 2:513. Also see English translations in Ryukoku Translation Center 1974, pp. 131–32.

like a father, he never abandons us;
like a mother, he is always with us.¹⁹

The message was clear: emperors do not bow down to sages appearing as bodhisattvas or even as Amida; retired emperors do not go for refuge to a teacher; and even a great bodhisattva does not appear as an imperial prince.

A final clause enjoins those who read the scriptures at public functions or at services to show their respect for the imperial household by bowing at each reference. The instructions were distributed to Nishi Honganji temples with a reminder from the Honganji staff director that at the core of Shinran's spiritual vision was belief in imperial law as fundamental and devotion to the notion of an imperial state (SHIGARAKI 1977, pp. 219–20). Participants in the tradition were informed that, by observing these instructions, they were being true to the founder's spirit as understood both in Japanese history and in Shinshū tradition.

These demands for radical accommodation to an imperial state in the use of the Shinshū scriptures did not emerge in a vacuum. They were the culmination of developments in the medieval and early-modern history of the Honganji, and also the result of a series of responses by the Nishi Honganji at critical moments in modern Japanese history. To some extent, it was also a response to internal pressures within the Honganji itself.

Amida and Emperor

In late 1941, with Japan's direct involvement in the Second World War imminent, the final step was taken in absolutizing the emperor's authority. As partners with the imperial state, both Nishi and Higashi Honganji scholars developed wartime or battleground theologies. Among the many titles published were: *Bukkyō no chūgi tetsugaku* 仏教の忠義哲学 [A Buddhist philosophy of loyalty] (1940); *Kannagara no michi to jōdo shinshū* 神ながらの道と浄土真宗 [The way of the kami and Jōdo Shinshū] (1941); and *On ichigenron: kōdō bukkō no shinzui* 恩一元論—皇道仏教の心髄 [A theory of the oneness of benevolence: The essence of imperial-way Buddhism] (1942).²⁰

On ichigenron, which presents a theory of the oneness of the

¹⁹SHIGARAKI 1977, p. 219; see SSZ 2:526. Also see English translation in Ryukoku Translation Center 1980, p. 84.

emperor's and Amida's benevolence, was the work of a Shinshū scholar, with a foreword contributed by the president of Ryūkoku University. The author's theory brought into play a logic which had served his tradition repeatedly at moments of crisis over the centuries, allowing the Honganji not only to survive as a religious order, but to prosper. In broader scope, it is a logic which goes back to the founding myths of land and people and the notion of the unity of religious and political affairs, and again to the encounter with an alien religious tradition—the Buddhist—and the theory of the native kami as manifestations of an underlying Buddhist reality. The Shinshū as a Japanese Buddhist tradition appears to have inherited from Shinran's teaching few resources, conceptual or other, to question, much less to resist, the demands of the state. The absolute authority of the emperor's command in prewar Japan may be seen as an extreme instance within this pattern. Religious symbols for the transcendent, such as Amida, faith (*shinjin* 信心), and nenbutsu, in theory are differentiated from the mundane and thereby have a capacity for criticism of all temporal authority, including that of the state. Instead, these religious symbols were subsumed by symbols for the national polity and imperial system.

At one point in *On ichigenron*, the author speculates that if the Buddha were to appear in Japan at that moment, there is no question but that he would expound upon the absoluteness of the emperor and clarify the meaning of the national polity (SHIGARAKI 1977, p. 238). The origins and developments of a theory of the oneness of benevolence (*on*), including treatments of the great Kamakura Buddhists, are worked out in detail; a lengthy section discusses the imperial national polity and the Shinshū:

The Shinshū teaches as basic to Amida's intent that, in living as citizens in the mundane world, we are to take imperial law as fundamental and submit absolutely to the [emperor's] command. People who oppose [this] are, consequently, excluded from Amida's salvation. Hence it cannot be true that the Shinshū's dharma-principle is incompatible with the imperial national polity. In other words, we can be good citizens of the empire because we dwell firmly in Amida's saving power; it is the Shinshū that is the very best religion (*shūkyō* 宗教) in terms of compatibility with the imperial national polity (SHIGARAKI 1977, p. 238; SASAKI 1942, p. 298).

²⁰SHIGARAKI 1977, pp. 237–38. For documents relating to these works, see Senji Kyōgaku Kenkyōkai 1988.

Numerous other examples might be cited from Shinshū writings which illustrate how both the Nishi and Higashi Honganji supported—virtually demanded—full participation of their members in the war effort, with an elaborately worked-out battleground theology. Indeed, Shinshū thought appears to have become the handmaiden of imperial absolutism. The identification of Amida's benevolence with that of the emperor made it possible to sacralize every sacrifice, including the giving of one's life itself for the imperial state, as an act of piety.

For Shinran, nenbutsu alone—faith alone—is true and real (*Tan-nishō*, SSZ 2:793.). He stands firmly in the Mahāyāna tradition in his orientation to this world as Amida's world and in his conviction that the only possibility for people in the last dharma-age is to live naturally (*jinen* 自然), through the Other Power of Amida's Primal Vow. Living naturally is by definition living free of calculation (*hakarai* はからい), the delusion that we have any power of our own to effect good for ourselves or for others. Shinran's declaration that he is "neither a monk nor of the world" symbolizes his experience of self-negation that makes possible, naturally, the underlying unity of the transcendent and the mundane. He never elaborates on concepts such as "the transcendent and the mundane as two truths," although they were readily available to him in the Mahāyāna Buddhist texts. For him, reality is the transcendent truth of Amida's Vow, or Buddha-dharma, manifesting itself as the mundane truth in the teaching of Śākyamuni and in the commentaries of the seven Pure Land masters, including the words of his own master, Hōnen. On the basis of his own experience of exile, there are times when conflict is to be anticipated between the truth of the nenbutsu and the social order.

Kakunyo, third head priest of the Honganji, and his son Zonkaku (1290–1373) are the two figures following Shinran who contribute decisively to shaping the tradition before Rennyō's tenure as eighth head priest. Living in a social and historical setting quite different from that of Shinran, they interpreted the tradition in ways which led to an elaboration of pairs of concepts such as the transcendent and the mundane, Buddha-dharma and imperial law. For Kakunyo, the transcendent relates to spiritual matters, specifically to birth in the Pure Land after death; the mundane is crucial for providing an ethical basis for those living this life in the assurance of birth in the Pure Land in the afterlife. Zonkaku also stresses the mundane

in his attempt to reconcile Shinshū teaching with Japan's indigenous tradition by setting the transcendent and the mundane side by side. For him, the relationship is as closely-balanced as a bird's wings or a cart's two wheels. A final implication of his position is that Buddhadharmā is to serve imperial law, in that the latter is the basis for the provision of food and shelter in this life.

Rennyō's thought is both continuous and discontinuous with each of his predecessors, Shinran, Kakunyo, and Zonkaku. From Shinran, Rennyō inherited an emphasis on faith or the nenbutsu alone as true and real; from Kakunyo, a deep commitment to preserve the transcendent through the vehicle of the Honganji as a religious institution; and from Zonkaku, *honji suijaku* thought, which provided a theoretical basis for accommodating the transcendent to the mundane by emphasizing the observance of existing social norms. Rennyō's approach, in an entirely different historical context, reflects his perception of the transient quality (*mujō* 無常) of the age in which he lived. His position has been described as dualist in that he emphasizes the afterlife (the transcendent) as the most important matter (*goshō ichidaiji* 後生一大事) in contrast with this life (the mundane)—the Pure Land in contrast to this defiled world.

During the Tokugawa period, the Honganji, in large measure dedicated to the service of those who governed, politicized and thereby dissipated much of its spiritual energy in a rigorously controlled scholasticism. At the same time, however, a tradition of *myōkōnin* 妙好人 piety prospered.²¹ Kōnyō, who lived virtually all of his life in the Tokugawa period, speaks out in his final message as the heir to Shinran, Kakunyo, Zonkaku, and especially Rennyō, at a moment of extreme crisis for the Nishi Honganji in early Meiji. The Honganji's modern history has carried forward much of his pattern of thought. What is perhaps new in the modern period is a disintegration of the capacity for religious symbols in all traditions to be effective in differentiating between the transcendent and the mundane. In that respect, Japan's imperial absolutism in the 1930's cannot be understood apart from influences derived from the encounter with modern Western secular and religious thought.

In conclusion, several tentative observations as to the relevance of the Honganji's pattern of response to what Western political

²¹D. T. Suzuki popularized the term *myōkōnin* in reference to the goodness and spontaneous expressions of piety reflected in the lives of unlettered Shinshū adherents.

theorists would, for a clearer understanding of Japanese civilization as a whole, see as a religious and political dilemma:

First, a pervasive theme in the materials we have presented is the preservation of the Honganji as a religious order. The point is complex, for the Honganji not only represents a line of dharma-transmission, it is also representative of a familial line of blood kinship (in respect to which significant parallels with Japan's imperial institution might be drawn). The preservation of both dharma and familial lineages appears to have been a guiding impulse for over six hundred years—from the time of Kakunyo's founding of a temple, Hongan-ji, at Shinran's burial site in the Ōtani Higashiyama district of Kyoto, to Rennyo's dramatic institutional expansion in late medieval Japan, and up through Kōnyo's response to the anti-Buddhist movement in early Meiji and the writing of wartime theologies in the 1940's.

Second is that a dual standard of attitudes exists—one among members of the community, and another directed at those deemed to be outsiders. At different points in the history of the Honganji, outsiders have variously been defined as rival Buddhist groups—whether other branches of the Shinshū, branches of Hōnen's Jōdo-shū, or the pre-Kamakura sects—as well as, in the modern period, enemies of imperial Japan. It is important to note that internal controversy, including sharp differences on matters of doctrine, has been tolerated as long as the disputes have not posed a serious threat to political life and the prosperity of the institution. For example, in the modern period, even as late as 1942, despite the extreme pressures of imperial absolutism, groups of Shinshū priests voiced sharp opposition to changing even a single ideograph in the Shinshū scriptures.

Third, participants in Shinshū tradition—including Shinran himself—saw no need to develop categories for sharp differentiation of religion and state. Indeed, at moments of crisis, highly ambiguous religious symbols such as *shinzoku nitai*, which blur distinctions in the interest of preserving unity and solidarity in the community, have emerged. At the affective level, it would appear that *shinzoku nitai* as a religious symbol has served the Honganji in ways similar to that in which *honji suijaku* theory has served Japanese Buddhists in general over the centuries, and also similar to that in which the notion of *saisei itchi* has served Japanese tradition as a whole.

An historian of religion, in writing of the “seamlessness” of the

early Japanese world of meaning in relation to the lasting imprint of Chinese script and the Buddha's image on Japanese culture and society, discusses the connectedness of government, religion, and art:

Indeed, the fact that political administration (*matsuri-goto*), religious cults (*matsuri*), and cultural activities, especially art, came to be thought of as interrelated but nonetheless separate dimensions of life indicates the extent to which the seamlessness of the early Japanese world of meaning was transformed under the influence of foreign perspectives on life and the world. Nevertheless, we also find the persistent impulse of the Japanese to re-homologize and to maintain the connection between various dimensions of life, especially that between political administration and religion, as well as that between religion and art (KITAGAWA 1976, p. 14).

In the case of the Shinshū, we have observed the emergence of a symbol which lends itself to non-differentiation between political administration and a religious institution rather than differentiation. As to the close relation between religion and art, or between religious value and aesthetic value, the issue is more complex. For Japanese tradition in general, this means that religious value is related immediately to specific concrete phenomena rather than to a theoretical or abstract absolute. For Shinran, however, might we not interpret the nenbutsu response to Amida's command—or, more specifically, the experience of faith in its purity, adamant hardness, and absence of doubt—as having aesthetic value? The question may be raised as to whether the aesthetic dimension of Shinran's religious experience as set forth in his writings is something other than simply non-differentiation between religion and art.²²

In our inquiry into the history of a major Shinshū concept, *shin-zoku nitai*, and its relationship to Japanese civilization, we have seen that, while this concept denotes differentiation—the transcendent and the mundane—this pair of entities has been viewed primarily in terms of a merging of separate identities. So, too, is the case

²²This matter requires considerable clarification, perhaps starting doctrinally with Shinran's view of "dharmakaya as suchness (formlessness)" in relation to "dharmakaya as compassion (form)." A related issue is addressed in ROGERS 1982, contrasting Shinran's *shinjin* with Rennyo's *anjin*. It is largely with Rennyo, drawing on some of Kakunyo's writings, that more traditional Japanese Buddhist aesthetic sensibilities, such as liturgical chanting and an emphasis on the calligraphic expression of nenbutsu in six ideographs, are institutionalized within the Shinshū. Shinran's *shinjin* aesthetic appears to be of a somewhat different order; in a sense, it is an aesthetic distrustful of form, or, at the least, involving a continuing dialectic of form and formlessness.

with the oneness of religious and political affairs (*saisei itchi*) and with the kami as manifestations of Buddhist reality (*honji suijaku*). How are we to understand this pattern of response to religious symbols?

One possible interpretive approach, perhaps especially congenial to those primarily familiar with symbols of radical transcendence in Western religious traditions, is to evaluate responses to such symbols using categories of separateness and oneness, dynamism and passivity. From this perspective, the symbols tend to be seen as successful insofar as they elicit dynamic responses: (1) the oneness of political and religious affairs means that religious symbols are not ruled out as a source of criticism of temporal authority; (2) the kami as manifestations of Buddhist reality means that the universality of Buddha-dharma may challenge the particularity of the Japanese kami; and (3) the transcendent and the mundane as two truths means that there is resistance to the merging of separate entities into one. On the other hand, these same symbols are seen as unsuccessful insofar as they elicit passive responses: (1) the oneness of religious and political affairs are interpreted to mean that worship is ancillary to government; (2) the kami as manifestations of Buddhist reality are interpreted to mean that buddhas passively serve the kami, or vice versa; and (3) the transcendent and the mundane as two truths are interpreted to mean that Amida merges with the figure of the emperor. The eye (mind and heart) of the observer, nurtured on religious symbols of radical transcendence, is drawn first to the separateness of the pair of entities with its potential for dynamic interaction and mutual criticism. In stressing the dynamic potential of that separateness, the harmonious passivity of their oneness may be entirely overlooked. In sum, to interpret Japanese religious symbols from such a perspective may be to miss their point entirely. Where are we to turn for clarification?

We look again to Shinran's view of reality as expressed in his writings and, in particular, to Rennyō's extraordinary success in attempting to institutionalize that vision in Shinshū history. We note that Shinran avoids the use of the kind of religious symbols, such as *shinzoku nitai*, that we have been discussing. Through his experience of Tendai's teaching of original enlightenment (*hongaku* 本覚), he was alert to the danger in Japanese society of too much oneness, too soon; he knew quite simply that what surpasses conceptual understanding—a simultaneity of sameness and opposition—

is irreducible to any single concept. However, without such concepts, how could the profundity of Shinran's vision be conveyed to successive generations? Kakunyo, Zonkaku, Rennyo, Kōnyo, and modern Shinshū theologians were dependent on such concepts to serve as religious symbols. Noteworthy is Rennyo's innovative appropriation of the concept of the oneness of the person to be saved and Amida who saves (*ki-hō ittai* 機法一体) to designate the salvific process at work in saying Amida's Name. The question presses again: what is the alternative to such symbolization?

The answer is surely that, finally, there is no single satisfactory solution. There is always the risk with religious symbols of missing their point entirely, of missing the sublimity of a founder's vision. This risk was all the greater for the Honganji in modern Japan at a moment when reality for the national community was defined in terms of an empire founded for eternity by imperial ancestors. In such a context, who would have been disposed to hear Amida's command apart from the imperial command to submit passively to the state's authority in the service of the nation? There were, however, those members of the Honganji and sectarian scholars who heard another command: they heard the command that Shinran had heard, that of Amida's compassionate summons to each of them to participate freely, without calculation, in this world as Amida's world, and not without strong reservations about the uncritical partnership of emperor and Amida. Indeed, there may have been some who discovered, through their engagement with the concept *shinzoku nitai* as a religious symbol, that their accommodation and submissiveness to the governing authority of their cherished land and people had been sacralized. Nevertheless, given the uniqueness of Shinran's teaching for Japan's cultural tradition, the Honganji's claim to be his authentic heir was severely tested in its assumed role as guardian of the state.

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