

The Holistic Apprehension of Religious Life in Shinran and Heidegger
— An Experiment in Comparative Shin Buddhist Thought —
親鸞とハイデガーにおける宗教的存在の把握
——現代真宗思想の観点からの比較研究の試み——

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Contemporary Shin Buddhism and Comparative Thought

The Japanese Pure Land Buddhist thought of Shinran is often said to hold a special place in the comparative study of religion. The reason frequently given is that Shinran's Shin Buddhist path, while evolving from within Mahayana traditions, employs symbols, narratives, and conceptual structures that appear to have close parallels in Christian thought. It is therefore argued that the Shin tradition, as a kind of amalgam of disparate religious characteristics, can provide an intermediary "bridge" facilitating dialogue and understanding between Christians and Mahayana Buddhists.¹ Elsewhere I have commented on some of the problems with this view, in particular its tendency to uproot Shin from the body of Mahayana traditions and to locate its significance primarily in aspects that appear to resemble Christian analogues.

It remains the case, however, that a comparative treatment of Shinran's thought is potentially of critical value for the understanding of Shin tradition, particularly in our global situation of ever increasing cross-cultural interaction and of deepening convergence in issues of practical life. In relation to the West, a consideration of the thought of Shinran together with certain recent continental thinkers in particular may aid us in articulating a Shin Buddhist stance regarding some of the pressing questions that challenge religious teachings in contemporary life.

The comparison here is not an attempt to claim that Shinran adumbrates strains of recent thought or that he is validated by resemblances. Neither does it assume the possibility or usefulness of merely adopting modern Western solutions to various intellectual quandaries now shared in Japan. Rather, exploring similarities between Shinran and recent Western thought may aid us in achieving a compelling understanding of the Shin Buddhist path by casting a fresh light on often overlooked aspects of Shinran's thought, by suggesting viable avenues for reinterpreting and reformulating what is most vital in the teachings, and by illuminating the presuppositions that frame habitual modes of thinking about religious issues in ways that enable us to recast those issues from a perspective more closely engaged with the Pure Land Buddhist tradition.

I will take up in this essay, as an example, the treatment of religious life in the early Heidegger, which bears resemblances in themes and method with Shinran's treatment of the Pure Land path. I will focus in particular on Heidegger's early lecture course, "The Phenomenology of Religious Life" (WS 1920-21, G60: *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens*), in which Heidegger explores the life-experience of the earliest Christianity (*Urchristentum*) through a reading of several of Paul's letters, chiefly Galatians and 1 and 2 Thessalonians. We find in these lectures a complex of closely intertwined themes that also receive deliberation in Shinran's writings, as revealed in particular by the methods he employs to elucidate the Pure Land teachings. I will label the themes discussed in this article (1) holism or "alreadiness,"² which in Shinran's writings is seen in the stance of always having already realized *shinjin* (the entrusting of oneself to the working of wisdom-compassion); (2) givenness, the transformation of one's existence that is experienced as either originating from outside the self (in Shinran, by "Other Power") or coming about of itself (by *jinen*); and (3) religious life as a new mode of temporalization. The centrality of these themes in Shinran may in fact be understood as distinguishing his Pure Land Buddhist vision within his own historical milieu.

Further, although it is not possible to discuss this topic here, the comparison between Shinran and Heidegger suggests a revised schema of

the position of Shin Buddhism in the context of Buddhist-Christian and interreligious dialogue, placing it at a farther remove from the modernist notions of faith and belief it is often identified with and perhaps more firmly within the compass of Mahayana traditions. Regarding this, two points may be mentioned. On the one hand, at the core of the similarities in outlook between Shinran and Heidegger that I will touch on below lies a set of issues familiar in Buddhist traditions. Both thinkers share a rejection of the paradigm of knowing anchored in the ego-self as a stable, autonomous subjectivity standing apart from the objective world. Instead, they both focus on the need for self-awareness of the radical finitude and situatedness of human existence, inclusive of its capacities for knowledge and understanding. At the same time, they are both acutely conscious of the inherent inclination of humans to disregard the inescapable conditionedness of their existence. A central issue for both thinkers, therefore, is the possibility of genuine awareness and how it can arise and exist within the ignorance and flux of the human condition.

On the other hand, recent Heidegger research has shed much light on the pronounced influence of Christian thought on the early Heidegger, particularly Luther's "theology of the cross," with its emphasis on *destructio* (Heidegger translates "Destruktion") as the critical stripping away—above all by God's "alien work"—of false self-attachment to human capacities.³ It may be said, therefore, that comparison (and contrast) of Shinran's religious thought with Heidegger adds another element to the interface between the Mahayana Buddhist and Christian traditions, allowing for greater precision in locating the character of Shin in particular.

I will begin with a brief sketch of Shinran's "theological" context, which is informed by Hōnen's establishment of the Pure Land school within Buddhist tradition. This will serve to highlight the general contours of Shinran's exposition of Buddhist life, within which comparative reflection with Heidegger may be undertaken. I will then go on to the three salient themes informing Shinran's method of articulating the Pure Land Buddhist path mentioned above. In discussing these, I will make comparative reference to Heidegger's analysis of Paul's expression of

early Christian religious life in *The Phenomenology of Religious Experience*. Heidegger focuses in particular on 1 Thessalonians, which is the earliest of Paul's extant letters and thus the earliest document of the New Testament.

The Problematic of Hōnen's Nembutsu Teaching

In order to grasp Shinran's basic orientation in his writings, it is useful to consider the historical backdrop of the chief intellectual issues he was wrestling with. It was Shinran's master Hōnen who had achieved perhaps the radical doctrinal innovation of the times by establishing the practice of vocal nembutsu as an independent, self-sufficient path of Buddhist praxis. Originally, the practice of nembutsu probably centered on mindfulness exercises conducted in veneration of Śākyamuni Buddha, and included elements of bodily worship and the reverent repetition of the name of the Buddha. Later, it developed into a basic practice of monastics involving ritual prostrations with the body, contemplation on the features of enlightened beings and vocal recitation of their names, conducted with long lists of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Although deeply familiar with such comprehensive modes of practice, embracing physical, mental, and verbal discipline, Hōnen taught that simply uttering the Name of Amida Buddha, "Namu-amida-butsu," entrusting oneself to his vow to save all beings, results in birth into Amida's buddha-field of enlightened activity, known as the Pure Land. No intellectual command of Buddhist philosophy, accumulation of merit, moral rectitude, or any act of practice other than the nembutsu is necessary.

Further, according to Hōnen's interpretation of the teachings, Amida's Pure Land offers an ideal environment for fulfilling the bodhisattva practices necessary for realizing Buddhahood. Thus, once born there, eventual attainment of Buddhahood becomes fully settled. The Pure Land Buddhist path based on the working of Amida's Vow is therefore an effective means toward Buddhahood—for Hōnen, the only viable way for people at present, given the long absence of an enlightened guide like Gotama Buddha and the increasingly defiled state of human exis-

tence in the world—and it can be practiced independently of any other Buddhist teaching or method of praxis. While traditionally the nembutsu practice involved mental concentration and the accumulation of numerous recitations, Hōnen taught that in the Pure Land path only the simple saying of “Namu-amida-butsu” with complete trust was involved. There was no specified manner of utterance, no necessity for any accompanying ritual or meditative endeavor, and no stipulation of the length of the period of practice or number of repetitions.

The question, of course, is why mere vocalization of Amida’s Name should hold the power to bring about birth into a buddha-field and eventual enlightenment, which in our present condition is virtually impossible to accomplish, even through the achievement of extensive learning, deep meditative states, heroic discipline, and compassionate action. Without an adequate demonstration that vocal nembutsu held such power, Pure Land praxis would remain an supplementary discipline within the existing schools of Buddhist tradition, one supportive practice to be performed in combination with a panoply of other methods.

Hōnen promulgated his teaching by adopting an innovative perspective on the nature of the practices taught in Buddhist tradition. He reasoned that, although the utterance of the Buddha’s name had long been transmitted in various Buddhist schools as one among countless different kinds of practice useful for attainment of enlightenment, the vocal nembutsu designated in Amida’s vow as the act leading to birth into the Pure Land was qualitatively distinct from every one of the thousands of other techniques found in the Buddhist teachings. While the physical act of voicing the Name of Amida in itself might be identical, in other forms of Buddhism it was performed together with various other practices, including the awakening of the aspiration for enlightenment (*bodhicitta*) and the selfless transference of merits, and like other practices, its fulfillment as praxis genuinely leading toward Buddhahood turned on the practitioner’s own purity of motive and powers of concentration and discipline.

The nembutsu taught in Amida’s vow, however, as the simple voicing

of “Namu-amida-butsu” accessible to all beings regardless of their moral qualities or spiritual capacities, was specifically selected by Amida Buddha as the means by which he could bring to fruition his compassionate vow to liberate all living things from samsaric existence. In other words, Amida, through his vow and the salvific virtue of his own already completed performance of endless aeons of bodhisattva practices, established the saying of the Name as the medium by which his own compassionate working actively reaches each being. Thus, the nembutsu has been prepared—already fulfilled *by Amida* as the act resulting in birth in the Pure Land—and given to beings as the cause of their attainment. Salvific activity is particularly appropriate in the present age, when the accomplishment of praxis as ordinarily understood in Buddhist tradition has receded beyond the reach of beings. Anticipating this situation, Amida’s vow teaches that one should relinquish the illusions and attachments focused on the self and its capacities and set aside the extensive body of traditional methods of praxis as no longer effective, since they require a purity of performance no longer achievable. The Pure Land tradition characterizes such practices as “self-power” and advocates instead a turn to the saying the nembutsu as the act that embodies “Other Power,” Amida Buddha’s wisdom-compassion functioning in the world.

Two aspects of Hōnen historical role relate directly to our concerns here with Shinran’s methodology in interpreting and articulating his religious awareness: the means by which Hōnen effected his ground-breaking contribution to Buddhist tradition, and Hōnen’s legacy as inherited by his disciples. Regarding the first, Hōnen is recognized as the first and perhaps most revolutionary “founder” of a native Japanese Buddhist tradition. Based on his principle of “the nembutsu selected in Amida’s primal vow” (*senjaku hongan nembutsu*) as the practice embodying the Buddha’s Other Power, he established the Pure Land school (Jōdoshū) as an authentic Buddhist path, effective in itself and independent from the traditionally recognized schools that had been transmitted to Japan from the Asian continent over the preceding centuries. Hōnen set about to accomplish this in his major writing, *Collection on the Nembutsu Selected*

in the *Primal Vow* (*Senjaku hongan nembutsu-shū*), composed in *kambun* (Chinese) and addressed to an audience versed in Buddhist erudition and its methods of discourse. Here, Hōnen systematically raises the traditional issues involved in recognizing the Pure Land teaching as a legitimate school of Buddhism, such as the identification of foundational sutras, the delineation of the historical lineage of masters by which the Pure Land path has been transmitted down to the present, and its doctrinal orthodoxy, demonstrated with reference to the sutras and the commentarial tradition. In his work, Hōnen argues logically and cogently on the basis of scriptural evidence, including extended citations from the recognized Chinese canon.

Hōnen allowed his work to be copied only by disciples during his lifetime, but it was published shortly after his death. It immediately garnered vehement censure and counter-argument from scholar-monks of traditional schools, attesting to the impact Hōnen's nembutsu teaching was already having in Japanese society, but also to the recognition of the forms of scholastic discourse and rational argument into which his thought had been cast. From the accounts of his followers and records of his spoken words and letters, it appears that Hōnen was an immensely charismatic figure, communicating his teaching to both the ordained and lay and persuasively responding to the questions of his many listeners from all walks of life. Nevertheless, the major formulation of his religious thought followed customary models, dictated by his formidable role in Buddhist history. This leads to the second issue.

Shinran's Methodology: A Phenomenology of Religious Life

It is commonly assumed that Shinran's major writing, *The True Teaching, Practice, and Realization of the Pure Land Way* (*Kyōgyōshō monrui*, also commonly abbreviated *Kyōgyōshinshō*), also composed in *kambun* with ninety percent of the text made up of quotations from the Buddha canon, was written to respond to scholar-monks of the established schools who had criticized *Senjakushū* and that therefore it is likewise a treatise in the form of scholastic argumentation. While Shinran

certainly composed the work for readers trained in reading Buddhist texts, and although he employs formal elements of conventional discourse, the spirit of his writing is more accurately indicated by the record of his spoken words taken up below. From the time of his conversion at the age of twenty-nine to his death at ninety-one, Shinran speaks of himself as a disciple of Master Hōnen, who had changed his life. Never does Shinran describe his task as other than articulating and transmitting an accurate grasp of Hōnen's teaching, particularly to the people of the countryside among whom he preached. His historical role, therefore, differs from his master's. While Hōnen worked to establish the legitimacy of the Pure Land Buddhist school, Shinran sought clarification by distinguishing between provisional and true understandings within the Pure Land path. In order to understand this more fully, we must turn to the second aspect of Hōnen's position in the tradition.

As we have seen, Hōnen asserted that the nembutsu as imparted to beings in Amida's vow differs profoundly from all other practices handed down in Buddhist tradition. Persons might, therefore, perform the utterance of the Buddha's name as another means of healing the mind and gaining merit, in continuous recitation or as an element of ritual worship or contemplative practice, or they might say the name as the act prescribed in Amida's vow, entrusting themselves wholly to the working of the Buddha's compassion and abandoning any notion of their own goodness or effort as contributing to realization. The former manifests self-power, the latter Other Power. Hōnen taught that it is only the latter that remains operative now for us. However, a serious difficulty in understanding this teaching arose among Hōnen's following, one Hōnen struggled to deal with but was unable to resolve doctrinally.

Disciples found that the nembutsu of Amida's vow as proclaimed by Hōnen in fact involves two elements, both of which are essential: on the one hand, the actual saying of Amida's Name, "Namu-amida-butsu," and on the other, the wholehearted entrusting of oneself to Amida's vow, which, as we have seen, is precisely what qualitatively distinguishes vocal nembutsu from all other methods of practice and makes one's perform-

ance of it the practice selected for beings and already fulfilled by Amida. For Hōnen, these two elements of practice and faith—utterance of the nembutsu and the entrusting of oneself to Amida's vow—were mutually and unproblematically interfused, but many who sought to follow his teaching found that in actual engagement, the path appeared to be defined by emphasis on one element or the other. The question became for many followers: which is central in the life lived in genuine accord with Amida's vow, practice or faith? In other words, concretely, how should persons of the nembutsu carry on their lives?

Those who emphasized practice tended to assume that since the nembutsu was devised and provided out of Amida's wisdom-compassion, those who entrust themselves to the Buddha's vow will spontaneously, out of joy and gratitude, seek to live in mindfulness of Amida and to recite the name as often as possible throughout the remainder of their lives. This view, however, sometimes shaded into ethical and eschatological concerns. Some assumed that practitioners of the nembutsu should seek to live lives appropriate for birth into Amida's buddha-field, lives of diligent recitation and moral rectitude; those who failed to display such dedication were viewed as negligent in their practice. Further, many adopted older views, in which nembutsu recitation was seen pragmatically, as a means of cancelling the karmic effects of one's past evil. This latter belief gave decisive weight to the nembutsu uttered at the moment of death, when the nullification of one's final defilements of karmic evil made birth in the Pure Land possible.⁴

By contrast, those who emphasized faith tended toward a more relaxed view of nembutsu recitation and other forms of religious observance or moral rigor, insisting instead on a total trust in Amida's compassion. The Pure Land sutras speak of ten or even a single utterance as adequate, and Hōnen affirms this teaching, since the name as prepared for beings by Amida holds the resultant virtues of his inconceivably long and perfect practice. When one takes refuge in the vow and utters the nembutsu, one's salvation is promised by Amida and one should have no misgivings. At an extreme, however, insistence on leaving all to Amida's

salvific activity led to forms of antinomianism, in which even moral restraint was viewed as the impulse to deny the fact of one's cravings and affirm one's own goodness. In more benign forms, emphasis on trust led to a denigration of continued utterance as evidence of doubt of the vow's power and as a residue of attachment to one's own action in bringing about attainment.

Hōnen sought to maintain a tenuous balance between these two, mutually disparaging positions of emphasis on praxis and emphasis on faith:

If, because it is taught that birth is attained with but one or ten utterances, you say the nembutsu heedlessly, then faith is hindering practice. If, because it is taught [in the commentaries] that you should say the Name "without abandoning it from moment to moment," you believe one or ten utterances to be indecisive, then practice is hindering faith. As your faith, accept that birth is attained with a single utterance; as your practice, endeavor in the nembutsu throughout life.⁵

Historically, however, we find that while Hōnen was able to transmit his insights through his own compelling presence, after his death, his disciples developed their individual interpretations of his nembutsu teaching in diverse directions, with some tending toward emphasis on nembutsu practice and other toward trust in the vow. The master, in short, had failed to achieve a clear doctrinal resolution of this issue of religious life.

The Core Concerns of Shinran's Pure Land Teaching

As I have noted, Shinran understood himself throughout his six decades of teaching activity as faithfully transmitting the path of nembutsu established by Hōnen, and there is no evidence anywhere in his writings that he viewed his own work as more than a clarification of the master's meaning, that is, what he calls "the true essence of the Pure Land way" (*jōdo shinshū*). Perhaps the central issue that Shinran found in need of

clarification after Hōnen's death was the entrenched tendency toward bifurcation of the nembutsu path into practice and trust described above, and it may be said that his stance regarding this issue informs the basic structure of his thought. This bears on our concerns here because his resolution of it is closely tied to his delineation the Pure Land Buddhist path. I will consider his approach briefly, focusing, solely for the sake of convenience, on a single passage of *Tannishō* ("In Lament of Departures [from Shinran's Teaching]"), a record of his spoken words compiled after his death. The following words, apparently a response to questions from close disciples, comprise one of the best known sections in *Tannishō*. I quote it in full:

The aim with which each one of you has made your way here, traversing the borders of more than ten provinces with no heed for your bodily safety or life, is wholly to ask about the path to birth in the land of bliss. But if, sensing something in me, you imagine that I know a path to birth other than the nembutsu, or that I am familiar with [special] writings on the dharma, it is indeed a great error. Should that be the case, since there are many eminent scholar-monks in Nara and on Mount Hiei, you would do better to meet with such people and inquire fully of them about the essentials for birth.

For myself, beyond receiving and entrusting myself to the words spoken by a good person, "Just say the nembutsu and be saved by Amida," nothing whatsoever is involved. Whether the nembutsu is truly the seed for being born in the Pure Land, or whether it is karma that causes one to fall into hell, I know not at all. Even in the instance that I have been deceived by Master Hōnen and, by doing the nembutsu, end up plunging into hell, I will have no regrets whatsoever. The reason is this. It is the person who could have attained Buddhahood by endeavoring in other practices who would surely regret having been deceived if he fell into hell because of saying the nembutsu. But my existence is such that [fulfilling] any practice is beyond reach, so it is clear that hell is my settled dwelling whatever

I might do.

If Amida's Vow is true and real, Śākyamuni's teaching cannot be lies. If the Buddha's teaching is true and real, Shan-tao's commentaries cannot be lies. If Shan-tao's commentaries are true and real, can what Hōnen said be a lie? If what Hōnen said is true and real, then surely my words cannot be empty.

Such, in essence, is the *shinjin* of the foolish person that I am. Beyond this, whether you entrust yourself, taking up the nembutsu, or whether you abandon it, must be a matter of your own reckoning. (*Tannishō*, 2)

From the opening words of the passage, it is possible to grasp the circumstances in which they were delivered. Shinran had spent approximately twenty years preaching and building a network of nembutsu practitioners in various villages of the Kantō region. Then, at about the age of sixty-three, he returned to Kyoto for reasons still variously conjectured, leaving his following under the guidance of a number of disciples in the different areas and devoting himself to writing in relative seclusion. The words recorded in *Tannishō* 2 are thought to have been spoken nearly twenty years after his return. Following his departure from Kantō, diverse strains of the Pure Land teaching gradually spread confusion among his adherents, who were also subjected to persecution by the local authorities and to harsh denunciations of the nembutsu teaching by followers of other schools. In moments of difficulty, disciples who acted as leaders in the various locales wrote to Shinran about their problems, and he responded with detailed answers, short commentaries and writings, and copies of tracts by others of Hōnen's disciples. The words recorded in *Tannishō* 2 were spoken when followers apparently felt compelled to make the arduous journey from the Kantō area to see the master in person, seeking reassurance, even, as Shinran notes, at the risk of their lives.

In fact, it appears from Shinran's letters that at least one of the party had taken ill on the trip and eventually died in Kyoto. Neverthe-

less, Shinran responds with some severity: if you seek from me special knowledge or scriptural evidence confirming the nembutsu path, you have made a big mistake. In that case, you should go elsewhere. Instead of answering with doctrinal analysis or scriptural evidence, Shinran offers simply his own example: 'For myself, beyond receiving and entrusting myself to the words spoken by a good person, "Just say the nembutsu and be saved by Amida," nothing whatsoever is involved.' Several distinctive and fundamental aspects of Shinran's approach to communicating the nembutsu teaching may be noted here. I will consider those mentioned earlier of holism, givenness, and temporalization.

1. *Holistic Apprehension*

I use "holistic" to characterize Shinran's fundamental stance in his writings, one that not only manifests the nature of his realization but also informs the methods of exposition that he employs. Regarding our specific concerns here, it may be said also to distinguish the tenor of his works from his master's *Senjakushū*, and further to link his awareness as teacher to basic issues both in Buddhist thought and in Heidegger. By "holistic" I mean above all the sense in Shinran that the realization of shinjin is the arising of an entire world of meaning in which the former self and world have been transformed; that one discovers oneself anew already within such a world of shinjin, but there is nothing a person has or could have accomplished to achieve entry; and that once having entered that world, the transformation is decisive, so that there is no return to what one had been. In terms of his writings, holism means that Shinran's stance is always one of already having realized shinjin; thus, he seeks to communicate the teaching by manifesting a transformed world or mode of existence, not by offering proof or reasoning within our ordinary frames of thought or by propounding a method of access. In this way, he provides a model of shinjin that undermines common notions of faith or belief based on presuppositions of the self as an autonomous subject or agent. It may be said that Shinran's term "to realize shinjin" (*shinjin gyakutoku*, *shinjin o u*) signifies not the subjective state of an individual

but the arising of a new world of meaning in which one comes to carry on one's life.

As we have noted, Shinran's efforts in this writings are devoted to clarifying the core of his master's Pure Land Buddhism, "the true essence of the Pure Land way." Such clarification turns in large part on working through the fundamental issue that Hōnen left unresolved and that divided his disciples: the problem of the disjunction of practice and trust, nembutsu and shinjin, outlined earlier. To accomplish this, Shinran found it necessary to build upon Hōnen's achievements in three discrete but interrelated ways. First, he had to pursue the distinction between self-power and Other Power beyond Hōnen's decisive use of it to differentiate Pure Land practice from that of all other schools of Buddhist tradition. Shinran further applies the distinction *within* the Pure Land path itself. This is because, in his analysis, the tendency toward the bifurcation of nembutsu and shinjin within Pure Land practice, in all its diverse forms, ultimately arises from self-power attachment to one's own capacities and failure to enter genuinely into Other Power.

Thus, although in *Senjākushū* Hōnen had sought to address the broad scholarly Buddhist community and therefore employed conventional methods of clerical discourse and argumentation, these are inevitably insufficient for Shinran's purposes. In other words, for Shinran, dependence on logical demonstrations based on proof-texts as foundational evidence is, in itself, finally ineffective for communicating the subtle demarcation of self-power and Other Power, for by itself it presupposes the validity of human powers of judgment. We see this attitude in Shinran's refusal to engage his disciples' questions as they wished in the *Tannishō* passage above, and also in such passages as the following, from a letter:

In your question regarding the [Pure Land] Buddhist teaching, you state that at the point of the awakening of the one thought-moment [of shinjin] , one is grasped and protected by the unhindered light of wisdom-compassion; hence, the karmic cause for [birth in] the Pure Land is established in ordinary times. This is splendid. Yet,

though you speak thus splendidly, it appears to have all turned utterly into your own calculative thinking. (*Lamp for the Latter Ages*, Letter 10; CWS, p. 537, revised)

Here, Shinran indicates that conceptual reasoning—when it is no more than an extension of intellectual effort in pursuit of a sense of security—may be doctrinally unexceptional and yet an obstacle to genuine apprehension of the path. What is necessary is, in Shinran's term, the “overturning” (*hirugaesu*) of self-power, including attachment to the perspicuity of one's powers of intellectual understanding and judgment.

Second, to communicate his understanding of the Pure Land path, Shinran can do no more than delineate self-power and Other Power as divergent modes of existence, thus awakening his disciples to their unwitting adherence to dispositions rooted in self-attachment. For an example, we may turn to the passage from *Tannishō* quoted above:

It is the person who could have attained Buddhahood by endeavoring in other practices who would surely regret having been deceived if he fell into hell because of saying the nembutsu. But my existence is such that [fulfilling] any practice is beyond reach, so it is clear that hell is my settled dwelling whatever I might do.

Here, after having refused to answer his disciples within the framework of their questions, Shinran elaborates on his response by delineating a stark contrast between two fundamental attitudes of existence: the person who might regret at having been deceived and Shinran himself, who will have no regrets whatever the outcome. In other words, he differentiates between “the person who could have attained Buddhahood by endeavoring in other practices” 自余の行もはげみて仏に成るべかりける身 and “the person incapable of fulfilling any practice” いづれの行もおよびがたき身, that is, the person for whom reliance on self-power is an option and the person for whom it has ceased to be thinkable. In this way, Shinran brings home to his disciples the meaning of their own presupposi-

tions in their questioning. Shinran's strategy here is in fact wholly typical of his method of exposition not only in his oral statements, but also his Japanese writings and even in his more systematic works such as *Kyōgyōshō monrui*. In explaining the meaning of self-power and Other Power in a letter, for example, Shinran begins: "There are two kinds of people who seek birth in the Pure Land: those of Other Power and those of self-power. This has been taught by the Indian masters and Pure Land teachers" (*Lamp for the Latter Ages*, Letter 2, p. 525). It may be said that Shinran's fundamental stance in his works is concisely stated here.

In addition, we see in Shinran's response to his disciples his insistence on attending to the concrete, lived situation of the nembutsu practitioner—in this instance, and at significant points throughout his writings, offering himself as example.⁶ As we have seen, in his writings Shinran is concerned less to expound a method of attaining salvation than to communicate a mode of existence in which liberation is already manifest. In his spoken words recorded in *Tannishō* 2 he seeks to convey a grasp of the Pure Land path by presenting the actually experienced world that arises to him personally. Thus, when disciples come to him seeking some sort of authoritative foundation for adherence to the nembutsu, in the form of texts or direct transmission, Shinran responds with an articulation of the perspective from his own stance, concluding, "Such, in essence, is the *shinjin* of the foolish person that I am." This focus is not simply a device for pastoral effectiveness, but arises directly from the core of Shinran's thought.

Third, Shinran resolves the problem of the bifurcation of *shinjin* and nembutsu not primarily through Hōnen's logic of selection/rejection (*senjaku*)—Amida's picking out the nembutsu from among all other practices as the means by which to bring all beings to his buddha-field, and based on this selection, the practitioner's own setting aside of other practices and taking up the Name—but, more radically, through disclosing a pervasive dimension of the nembutsu practitioner's existence in which the subject-object dichotomy in relation to the Pure Land path has been overcome. This is expressed most directly in Shinran's writings in his concep-

tion of shinjin, not as a person's subjective attitude toward Amida's vow or the Name as practice, as had previously been assumed, but as the Buddha's nondiscriminative wisdom-compassion given to the person of nembutsu. Thus, a person's shinjin and Amida Buddha are one. Subjectively, it is here that the possibility of regret, or of calculative thinking, might fall away. This basic motif in Shinran indicates precisely how utterance of the nembutsu can be the Buddha's practice given to beings. It is because such utterance comes to be enacted in beings' existence not as intentional praxis but as a manifestation in the world of enlightened wisdom-compassion.

In this complex of traits that informs what I have termed Shinran's "holistic" apprehension and that distinguishes Shinran's thought and methods of expression from those of Hōnen, we find a deep-rooted convergence with the viewpoint of Heidegger in his *Phenomenology of Religious Life*. As mentioned earlier, Shinran and Heidegger take similar stances in response to a shared problematic. Their outlooks are characterized by (1) a rejection of commonsense notions of knowing as a relationship between an autonomous subjectivity and stable objects of the world, and (2) concern with the problem of the possibility of genuine awareness within the human situation of conditionedness and finitude. I will briefly indicate some of the points of resonance between the characteristics of Shinran's holism with Heidegger's analysis of early Christian life-experience as expressed in Paul's letters.

i. Rejection of Reliance on Doctrinal Reasoning

As we have noted, Shinran eschews the quest for assurance based on an intellectual grasp of doctrine. In this, the tenor of his work differs even from his master's *Senjakushū*. While Shinran likewise employs the conventions of learned interpretation and exposition, his writings give the impression less of an orderly, rational edifice progressively rising from a solidly laid foundation than of superimposed perspectives and the repeated plumbing of terms and passages from scriptural texts in order to disclose their profound meanings. Signs of similar tendencies in exposi-

tion are also in evidence in Paul according to Heidegger's reading. Heidegger comments, for example:

It is noticeable *how little Paul alleges theoretically or dogmatically....* The situation is not of the sort of theoretical proof. The dogma as detached content of doctrine in an objective, epistemological emphasis could never have been guiding for Christian religiosity. On the contrary, the genesis of dogma can only be understood from out of the enactment of Christian life experience.... (emphasis in original; PRL 79/ G60: 112)

What is primary is not doctrinal rationalization but rather life experience, and such life experience is accessible in texts through reading in the manner of "enactment," not merely the theoretical grasp of conceptual content. In terms of Paul's letters, Heidegger explains his method:

If we present this object-historically, Paul appears as a missionary who talks as a usual wandering preacher, without attracting too much attention. Now we no longer observe the object-historical complex, but rather see the situation such that we write the letter along with Paul. We perform the letter-writing, or its dictation, with him. The first question is: How does Paul, in the situation of a letter-writer, stand to the Thessalonians? (PRL 61/ G60: 87)

To turn to the situation through understanding by enacting means, for Heidegger, to stand in the given, holistic "factual life experience" of interrelationships from which it arose and in which it gains meaning. Likewise in *Tannishō*, we see not abstract doctrine but a series of mappings of relationships between Shinran and his disciples, his master Hōnen, and the entire historical tradition of the Vow.

ii. Self-power and Other Power as Modes of Existence

As we have seen, for Shinran, entry into the field of realization is

not achieved through any deliberation or intentional act of the person and therefore is not the result of a progressive, continuous movement along a continuum stemming from our ordinary life. For this reason, it can only be depicted as already having arisen in entirety, or in contrast with other modes of existence. Heidegger's thinking traces a similar path. He continues in the passage quoted above: "[Paul's] procedure of proof is nowhere a purely theoretical complex of reasons, but is rather always an original complex of becoming of the kind that, in the end, is also merely shown in a proof. What reigns here is the opposition of basic compartments of practical life" (emphasis in original/ PRL 80/G60: 112-113).

The "original complex of becoming" may be taken to be correlative, I think, to the realization of shinjin in Shinran, by which a person is brought to become (*shikarashimu*) "one who enacts shinjin" (*shinjin no gyōnin*) or authentically a person of the nembutsu (*nembutsu-sha*). As we have seen above, Shinran conceives of shinjin not as subjective or substantial—not an attitude or element of a person's subjectivity—but as holistic, itself the arising of an entire world of meaningful relations. This leads him to expound shinjin in terms of self-power and Other Power modes of life, where Other Power is the negation of self-power.

Heidegger notes in Paul a device analogous to Shinran's response to his disciples: "The entire question [of when the Parousia will occur] for Paul is not a cognitive question.... Thus he juxtaposes two different ways of life" (PRL 72/ G60: 102-103). Heidegger is referring here to the central theme of 1 Thessalonians. The Christian converts of the city of Thessalonica have become concerned that some among them have died before Christ's return, and they ask Paul what will become of their fellows and precisely when the Parousia will occur. Heidegger takes special note of Paul's strategy in responding to the second question.

[Y]ou yourselves know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When people say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as travail comes upon

a woman with child, and there will be no escape. But you are not in darkness, brethren, for that day to surprise you like a thief, for you are all sons of light and sons of day; we are not of the night or of darkness. (1 Thessalonians 5: 2-5)

As Heidegger observes,

[Paul] does not say, “at this or that time the Lord will come again”; he also does not say, “I do not know when he will come again”—rather, he says: “You know exactly....” This knowledge must be of one’s own, for Paul refers the Thessalonians back to themselves and to the knowledge that they have as those who have become. (PRL 72/ G60: 102-103)

We will take up the problem of knowledge below, but note here that religious life stands in contrast to our ordinary pursuits of “peace and security” as fully and exclusively as light and darkness, day and night. They are distinct modes of life, and it is the person who has become one of Paul’s congregation who stands in knowledge of the difference.

iii. The Condition of Having Realized Shinjin

As we see in the opening words of the *Tannishō* passage, Shinran rejects his disciples’ quest for a sense of assured self-confidence based on scriptural texts or authoritative transmission. This is because such attempts to verify the Pure Land path arise as an extension of false presuppositions about the self as autonomous subject and capable agent. For Shinran, it is precisely clinging to such an ego-self and its reasoning and judgments that is the basic obstruction to entry into religious existence. From the reverse perspective, “The term ‘Other Power’ means being free of any form of calculative thinking” (*Lamp for the Latter Ages*, Letter 10, CWS I: 537). Thus his insistence that, for himself, “nothing [beyond receiving and trusting Hōnen’s words] is involved.”⁷ It might seem that, in this rejection of reliance on doctrinal learning and

conceptual grasp, Shinran is merely professing a kind of “blind faith” in Hōnen’s teaching. He goes on, however, to clarify in concrete detail what it means that “nothing else is involved,” and thus opens up a quality of experience in religious engagement that contrasts utterly with his disciples’ expectations and the unexamined viewpoint underlying their questions.

Shinran explains: “Whether the nembutsu is truly the seed for being born in the Pure Land, or whether it is karma that brings one to fall into hell, I do not know at all.” Shinran’s negation here—“I do not know at all”—may seem a resigned agnosticism that forms the passive, reverse face of unreflective faith, but the significance of this forceful expression for Shinran is evident from another use later in *Tannishō*:

I know nothing at all of good or evil. For if I could know thoroughly, as Amida Tathagata knows, that an act was good, then I would know good. If I could know thoroughly, as the Tathagata knows, that an act was evil, then I would know evil. But with a foolish being full of blind passions, in this fleeting world—this burning house—all matters without exception are empty and false, totally without truth and sincerity. The nembutsu alone is true and real. (*Tannishō*, “Postscript”)

Shinran’s words here are surely a response to a question similar in spirit to that of his Kantō visitors, though posed from a different perspective: What must I do to attain birth in the Pure Land? or perhaps more likely, How can I attain birth, even though I have committed evil? Shinran’s unequivocal assertion is precisely the same as in *Tannishō* 2—“I know nothing at all...” (*sōjite motte zonchi-sezaru nari*)—and holds the same significance. “Knowing” in this context—the knowing that Shinran’s disciples seek and that Shinran disavows—means presupposing in oneself some purchase on what is true and real that enables proper judgment and appropriate action. In our daily lives, our normal assumption is that we ourselves most essentially are that rightly adjudicating subjectivity and

agency. Shinran's 'not knowing' is his personal denial of this assumption, and it entails knowing in another mode, such that: "The nembutsu alone is true and real," and "If Amida's vow is true and real,... my words cannot be empty." It is knowing as having realized shinjin, where shinjin is not an aspect of one's own subjectivity or a grasp of doctrine, but itself the arising of a transformed world in which one carries on one's life. As Shinran states, "The heart of the person of shinjin already and always resides in the Pure Land. *Resides* means that the heart of the person of shinjin constantly dwells there" (*Lamp for the Latter Ages*, Letter 3, CWS I: 528).

Heidegger takes up a similar nexus of knowing and having entered a mode of religious life in his treatment of Paul's early letters. He notes the frequent use of expressions for "having-become" and for "knowing," commenting, regarding his method: "The thorough pursuit of the repetition of the same word seems external; but one must view this, in an enactment-historical understanding, as an ever-repeatedly surfacing tendency, as a motif" (PRL 65/ G60: 93). In other words, the expression arises from within and manifests the condition of religious life. Heidegger notes regarding Paul's converts that "they have a knowledge of their having-become," that is, they are self-aware of their conversion by Paul. Further: "This knowledge is entirely different from any other knowledge and memory. It arises only out of the situational context of Christian life experience" (PRL 65/ G60: 94). We see in these statements that Heidegger's analysis of Paul reveals a mode of communication similar to what we have seen in Shinran. It is not theoretical exposition conducted in our ordinary manner of conceptual explanation, but a speaking out of the condition of "having-become" in a way that effects change of the hearer. Thus Heidegger states that the early Christians' "having-become is also Paul's having-become," for their conversion turns on Paul's "entrance into their life."

In Shinran's case, we see him in *Tannishō* offering his own 'having-realized' to his disciples as the only way by which his words, which "cannot be empty," might enter into their lives, just as Hōnen's words entered

his. Moreover, that which is transmitted in this way is the “truth and reality of the vow.” Shinran’s “having-realized,” like that in Paul, is not without awareness, and Shinran expresses the mode of religious life experienced as realization of shinjin in negative terms as having no regret. For the disciples of Shinran and of Paul, as Heidegger puts it, “Their having-become is linked to his entrance into their life” (PRL 65/G60: 93). In this way, for Shinran, the condition of ‘having-realized’ shinjin is also a mode of life in the reality of the vow.

The Pure Land Buddhist path as Shinran has himself experienced it is itself precisely that mode of human life in which one’s perceptions arising from presupposed constructs of the self as autonomous subject and all else as its objects come to be apprehended as porous and hollow, so that one’s existence in the world is grasped, from within, in its actual finitude. Shinran expresses his insight, “My existence is such that [fulfilling] any practice is beyond my reach; hence, it is clear that hell is my settled dwelling whatever I do.” Here, the insistent imposition of self-interested judgments and preconceptions has disintegrated. This awareness differs fundamentally from the outlook of his interlocutors, who seek to avail themselves of a dependable means by which to reach the Pure Land. To convey to his disciples the nature of the path in a way that avoids reinforcing their self-reifying premises about religious engagement, Shinran finds that he can do no other than offer an expression of his own awareness as it arises from within his condition as a practitioner who enacts shinjin and lives the nembutsu or Other Power.

The problematic of self-awareness from within the stance of contingency and finitude that Shinran and Heidegger share leads toward a common resolution that Heidegger expresses as the fusion of having-become and knowing. This fusion implies a temporal tense that has been termed “alreadiness,” the “always already” that both Shinran and Heidegger express. In addition, there are further significant facets of the holistic character of religious life experience that are necessarily implied in what we have discussed above and that therefore are major themes in the two thinkers. It is possible here only to mention the two most salient,

givenness and temporality. Both of these themes arise from the impossibility of charting any process of entry into religious life originating from within the bounds of the finitude and conditionedness of human existence.

2. *Givenness*

As we have seen, the central issue of Shinran's theology is the resolution of the bifurcation of trust and practice, *shinjin* and *nembutsu*, that Hōnen had struggled with but bequeathed to his disciples. Hōnen had taught that the *nembutsu* as simple utterance of the Name has been prepared for beings and given to them by Amida, enabling them to be born in his buddha-field. The problem was how the Buddha's giving of the *nembutsu* actually occurred for the individual practitioner. Shinran's distinctive answer turns on Amida's giving (*ekō*) the practitioner his own enlightened wisdom-compassion as *shinjin*. It is not primarily that the person says the *nembutsu* out of trust that it is the praxis indicated by Amida; rather, the practitioner's *nembutsu* is itself Amida's own fulfilled practice, for its enacting is the self-manifestation of the Buddha's wisdom-compassion that has become the practitioner's *shinjin*. Realization of *shinjin* is a mode of having-become in which a meaningful world arises pervaded by the *nembutsu*. Givenness, therefore, is a central theme in Shinran's thought.

What Shinran terms Amida's "giving" rises to awareness as the affirmative face of the falling away of the assumptions of calculative thinking. Thus Shinran states, "No self-working [i.e., *hakarai*] is the working [of buddha-wisdom]," and further, "The term 'Other Power' means being free of any form of calculation" (*Lamp for the Latter Ages*). From the perspective of our concerns here, two meanings are indicated by these expressions. First, it is only an encounter with what becomes manifest as Other-than-self—Otherness that works to dissolve the self's efforts to manage existence according to its own advantage—that can precipitate an awareness not fixed in egocentric self-reification. In *Tannishō* 2 above, when Shinran refers to Hōnen ("entrusting myself to the saying of a good person," "even if I have been deceived by Master Hōnen"), he is

speaking of such a transformative encounter. It is for this reason that elsewhere he also speaks of Hōnen as a manifestation of Amida. Second, because of the character of givenness, Otherness functions not as objectively present to a self-determining subject but as a kind of enveloping backlight against which the self and the things of the world emerge together in interrelationship. It is not that one freely apprehends the world from a transcendent standpoint, but rather that the apprehension of self and world arises from experience illumined by a pervasive otherness. When Shinran speaks of the absence of regret even if deceived, or of hell as decidedly his dwelling, he is speaking not from the domain of doctrine or of common sense, but from within an immediacy and directness of experience in which the notion of autonomously determining the parameters of his existence has been replaced by a consciousness of having been brought to an encounter with those parameters through what is genuinely other.

An analogical notion of givenness is seen in Heidegger's *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*, in the explanation that the early Christians' "having-become is linked to [Paul's] entrance into their life," and further that it effects a connection with God. Heidegger focuses, for example, on Paul's sentence in 1 Thessalonians 1: 6: "And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit," explaining:

The ["acceptance of the word (proclamation)"] brought the despair with it, which also continues, yet at the same time a "joy" which comes from the Holy Spirit is alive—a joy which is a gift, thus not motivated from out of one's own experience. This all belongs to the character of the *genesthai* (having-become). The "word of God" (*logos theon*) is at the same time a subjective and objective genitive. The having-become is understood such that with the acceptance, the one who accepts treads upon an effective connection with God. (PRL 66/G60: 94-95).

In relation to our topic here, we may note that the word of God enters the Christians' lives through Paul and effects of "transformation of life." All this is given in that it comes from without and is alien to what the person has known. Moreover, it is not that ordinary life is abandoned, but rather that it comes to be characterized by a doubleness: "The acceptance consists in entering oneself into the anguish of life. A joy is bound up therewith, one which comes from the Holy Spirit and is incomprehensible to life" (PRL 66/ G60: 95). This quality of doubleness is not unrelated to the character of religious awareness as both dichotomous and nondiscriminative, so that "the 'word of God' is at the same time a subjective and objective genitive." The motifs surrounding givenness here, including even the "word" of proclamation, parallel closely Shinran's expression of entrusting himself to what Hōnen told him and may be seen to emerge as aspects of a similar holistic grasp of experience.

3. *The Arising of a New Temporality*

Temporality is a major theme of Shinran's thought, one that, in its prominence as well as the interpretation given it, again distinguishes him from his master and from the preceding Pure Land tradition. Two critical aspects of time find expression in the *Tannishō* passage above. First, Shinran speaks of his entrusting himself to Amida's Vow through receiving Hōnen's teaching. As he explains repeatedly elsewhere, he understands such an encounter to be taught in the *Larger Sutra* when Śākyamuni Buddha speaks of beings' "hearing" Amida's Name. The sutra passage employs the term *ichinen*, which Hōnen had interpreted to mean "saying the nembutsu" but which Shinran breaks with tradition to interpret as expressing the temporal quality of "hearing": "*Ichinen* (one thought-moment) is time at its ultimate limit, where the realization of shinjin takes place" (*Notes on Once-calling and Many-calling*, CWS I: 474). "Time at its ultimate limit" indicates both the shortest instant of time and the interruption of ordinary temporality, and it is possible to see Shinran's understanding as reflecting the holistic character of his apprehension of religious life. Since there is no process a person can initi-

ate in time to bring about entry into life in shinjin, its arising may be said to emerge abruptly, in the briefest “one thought-moment.”

Further, in explicating the sutra’s term “one thought-moment” (*ichinen*), Shinran speaks not only of the “ultimate brevity of the instant in which the true cause of one’s birth in the fulfilled land becomes definitely settled through one’s hearing the power of the Vow” (“Chapter on Practice,” 34) or the “ultimate brevity of the instant of the realization of shinjin (*shingyō*)” (“Chapter on Shinjin,” 60), but also of “the ultimate brevity *and expansion* of the length of time in which one attains the mind and practice [i.e., shinjin and nembutsu] that result in birth in the Pure Land” (*Passages on the Pure Land Way*, emphasis added). The time of realizing shinjin is not merely momentary, an instant removed from the ordinary passage of time, but involves the generation of a new temporality that emerges inseparably from that moment.⁸ This temporalization of expansion also finds expression in the *Tannishō* passage under consideration.

In explaining his own stance to his disciples, Shinran discusses his religious existence in terms of absence of regret: “Even in the instance that I have been deceived by Master Hōnen and, by doing the nembutsu, end up plunging into hell, I will have no regrets at all.” Regret in itself involves a temporal awareness. It may be viewed as a kind of affective hypothetical projection in which one finds that one’s present state is less than what one had had the power in the past to achieve or become. It is a clinging to an assumed potential that lies wholly in one’s past, the neglect of which now informs one’s present. For the person in regret, it is adhering to that supposed past potential that most decisively colors one’s perceptions of one’s present life, so that one’s full existence is temporally displaced. Similarly, to say that one will have no regrets in the future normally means that one is exerting all one’s powers in the present in expectation of some fulfillment to come.

When Shinran, however, states that he will have no regrets in the future, he is rooting himself in the present and expressing his relinquishment of attachment to any capacity as agent, whether it lie in the past,

present, or future. Regardless of what his future may be, he can have no regrets. There is nothing in the past existence of the ego-self to which he can cling in the present, and thus nothing of his present capacities on which to base hopes for a different future. Shinran's awareness is such that he perceives the self's existence in its finitude, bound about by false, discriminative awareness and incapacity. Here, Shinran's existence condenses into a single moment bereft of differentiation. Calculative thinking falls away and the sameness of karmic bondage comes to light.

In that moment, however, Shinran also discovers himself within the temporal flow of the action of Other Power from the past, so that "if Amida's Vow is true and real ... my words cannot be empty." On the one hand, "desires are countless, and anger, wrath, jealousy, and envy are overwhelming, arising without pause; to the very last moment of life they do not cease, or disappear, or exhaust themselves" (*Notes on Once-calling and Many-calling*, CWS I: 488). One lives out the karmic acts of the past that inform one's present existence. On the other hand, the person of shinjin "dwells in the stage of the truly settled," so that birth in the Pure Land at the time of death is completely settled, and "constantly practices great compassion" ("Chapter on Shinjin," 65). The realization and acceptance of finitude, which can occur only by standing fully within it in the present, leads to an altered, doubled temporality in which the future (hell / enlightened wisdom-compassion) pervades and transforms the past and the present. Amida Buddha and his vow may in fact be said to signify precisely this dynamic, transformative temporality. For the practitioner, time ceases to be an abstract, fleeting instant in the flow of time and becomes the lived time of conditioned awareness.

Temporality is thus an inherent aspect of the apprehension of holistic, finite perspective seen in Shinran and Heidegger, for human finitude is characterized by discriminative awareness. It also forms a major theme of both 1 Thessalonians and Heidegger's commentary on it. We may see the continuity in Heidegger's thinking with the character of a holistic perspective discussed above in his comments on the following passage from Paul's letter, responding to the question of precisely when

Christians should expect Christ's return: "But as to the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (5: 1-2). Heidegger remarks:

When will the Parousia take place?... Paul does not answer the question in worldly reasoning. He maintains a total distance from a cognitive treatment, but does not also, in that, claim that it is unknowable. Paul enacts the answer in juxtaposing two ways of life.... What is decisive is how I comport myself to it in actual life. (PRL 69-70/ G60: 99)

We find in Heidegger's summary of Paul's method of exposition both the rejection of ordinary reasoning and the focus on concrete modes of life that we have considered above. Here, a temporalizing dimension is added in Heidegger's contention that, for Paul, the Christians already "know well": '[Paul] says: "You know exactly...." This knowledge must be of one's own, for Paul refers the Thessalonians back to themselves and to the knowledge that they have as those who have become' (PRL 72/ G60: 103). The Parousia that is the future is already known in the present as part of the knowledge that belongs to the experience in having-become from the past. Regarding Paul directly, Heidegger states:

Paul lives in a peculiar distress, one that is, as apostle, his own, in expectation of the second coming of the Lord. This distress articulates the authentic situation of Paul. It determines each moment of his life. He is constantly beset by a suffering, despite his joy as apostle. (PRL 68-69/ G60: 98)

Later, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger will analyze the role of mortality in informing the present existence of the person who breaks the oblivion of daily distractions to live authentically. For our concerns here, we may simply note that the holistic quality of finite human existence as deline-

ated by both Heidegger and Shinran implies, for both thinkers, an acute sense of temporality as an unfolding out of the past toward the future but focused in present existence.

Conclusion

No more than a rough sketch has been possible here, but the evident parallels in style of thought and methods of expression between Shinran and Heidegger seen above may be both illuminating and challenging for students of Shin Buddhist thought. I will mention three general issues here that appear to gain in clarity.

The first is the nature of shinjin, perhaps *the* central topic in Shinran's writings and the lynchpin in his solution to Hōnen's dilemma of the bifurcation of trust and practice. Shinran states that beings "acquire" or "attain" shinjin (*shinjin o u*) and he identifies shinjin with the mind of Amida. How are we to understand such statements? There is a tendency in scholastic formulations of the teaching both to subjectivize shinjin—as trust, faith, compassion, self-reflection, and so on—and to reify it as a substance—as *something* given by Amida, the Buddha's virtues, Buddha-mind, and so on. These tendencies lead to the casting of issues of shinjin in a dichotomous subject-object framework. It appears that many of the quandaries pondered under the traditional Shinshūgaku category of "issues of the relationship between practice and trust" (*gyō-shin ron*) arise specifically through the application of subject-object or agent-object (*nō-sho*) discrimination.

As we have seen, however, the convergences in method and outlook between Shinran and Heidegger are rooted precisely in the efforts of the two thinkers to deconstruct the commonsense presuppositions of the self as possessed of autonomous subjectivity and agency. From their perspective, instead of viewing the words of the teaching as indicating transcendent realities in which one decides to believe, it is more natural to understand the realization of shinjin as the arising of a whole world in which the language of the Pure Land tradition is meaningful and, to borrow a term from Charles Taylor's analysis of Heidegger's view of language,

constitutive of the way in which one carries on one's life.⁹ Is not the arising of such a world of shinjin in fact at the heart of term *jinen* ("being made to be so," natural, spontaneous coming about) that Shinran adopts in his late years?

Another general issue on which comparison with Heidegger casts light is temporality. Shinran's attention to temporal dimensions of the path is pervasive in his thought, but comprehensive treatments are rare. Questions that are debated on the terrain of our usual frameworks of objectified time—When does attainment of birth occur? When does the phase of "return to this world from the Pure Land" (*gensō*) take place?—may be seen perhaps to share something of the perspective of the earliest Christians, who asked Paul to locate the second coming on the calendar. Does not Paul's answer, highlighted by Heidegger, that "you yourselves know well" have a parallel in Shinran's response in *Tannishō* 2?

Finally, to return to an issue mentioned at the outset, is the place of Shinran's thought in the field of comparative religion. The introduction of the early Heidegger as an interface into the scheme of Shin Buddhist-Protestant Christian conversation lends greater precision to significant questions. Behind the deconstruction of the autonomous subject in Heidegger stands Luther's *destructio*, his notion of the "alien work of God... making us despair, so that he may exalt us" ("Heidelberg Disputation," thesis 4).¹⁰ The theological concerns of the early Heidegger reinforce the validity of his presence as a "bridge," a thinker who, by abstracting the critique of the stable subject-agent from the Christian soteriology in which it was embedded, makes it more available for comparative Christian-Buddhist discussion. At the same time, we may take note of the astute insights of another theologian of the period, one with some directly comparative interests, Karl Barth. In his list of similarities and dissimilarities between Reformed Christianity and Shin Buddhism, Barth notes: "Among the Jodoistic ideas parallel to the Reformed, we miss any doctrine of the law and also of the holiness, or wrath of Amida." What Barth identifies as missing from Shin is, of course, precisely what Luther means by the "alien work of God": "The Lord humbles and frightens us

by means of the law.” In Heidegger’s abstracted version, perhaps the alien work is performed by death. But if Barth is correct, what holds the power to move the deconstruction of the self in Shin? Does the Other function, and is it imagined, altogether differently than in the West?

Such questions and potential points of elucidation come into view by bringing Shinran’s thought into comparison with Heidegger.

Abbreviations

- CWS *The Collected Works of Shinran*. D. Hirota et al. trans. Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997.
 G60 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 60: *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens*. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1995.
 PRL *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*. Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei, trans. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.

Notes

- (1) For an explicit statement, see Jan van Bragt, “Buddhism—Jōdo Shinshū—Christianity: Does Jōdo Shinshū Form a Bridge between Buddhism and Christianity?” *Japanese Religions* 18:1 (January 1993).
- (2) A term Thomas J. Sheehan suggests as a translation for Heidegger’s *Gewesenheit*. See T. Sheehan, “Heidegger’s ‘Introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion,’ 1920-1921,” in *The Personalist* 60 (3): 312-324.
- (3) See especially Luther’s “Heidelberg Disputation,” which Heidegger directly refers to.
- (4) This view was grounded particularly in passages from the *Sutra of Contemplation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life*.
- (5) Quoted in D. Hirota, trans., *Plain Words on the Pure Land Way: Sayings of the Wandering Monks of Medieval Japan* [a translation of *Ichigon hōdan*] (Kyoto: Ryukoku University, 1989), pp. 12-13.
- (6) Cf. the Postscript to *Tannishō*, where the compiler Yuien comments, “How grateful I feel for Shinran’s words, in which he gives himself as an example in order to make up realize we are in delusion, knowing nothing at all of the depths of our karmic evil or the vastness of Amida’s benevolence” (CWS I: 679).
- (7) In later passages of *Tannishō* written by Shinran’s disciple Yuien, the issue of the significance of learning in religious life is taken up directly. See in particular *Tannishō* 12.
- (8) Shinran’s view of time may be compared with Augustine’s notions of *intentio* and *distentio*. See my *Asura’s Harp: Engagement with Language as*

Buddhist Path, pp. 128-132.

- (9) Charles Taylor, “Heidegger on Language,” in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall, eds., *A Companion to Heidegger* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), pp. 433-455.
- (10) See Benjamin D. Crowe, *Heidegger's Religious Origins: Destruction and Authenticity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), p. 45.

This article was delivered as the Keynote Address at the Biennial Conference of the International Association for Shin Buddhist Studies, June 13, 2009, at Ryukoku University, Kyoto.

キーワード 親鸞，ハイデガー，比較思想