

An Interpretation of the *Anjin Ketsujōshō*

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Introduction

The *Anjin Ketsujōshō* 安心決定鈔 is a short Pure Land treatise of unknown authorship, not known to Shinran (1173-1262) but known to his great grandson Kakunyo (1270-1351). Rennyō (1415-1499), the eminent Shinshū abbot, spoke of it as a valuable spiritual resource. It has been (hopefully) ascribed to various eminent authors but nothing certain about its authorship has been settled. Many conclude that it was probably a production of the Seizan Jōdo sect.¹

If it be asked why then the opening sentence is addressed to Jōdo Shinshū believers, it may well be that *shū* 宗 in this case means not “sect,” but literally “true faith,” i.e., “this presents the right understanding of the means of attaining to the full assurance of Pure Land faith.” And it is certainly true that the Seizan sect was most arduous and convinced in its advocacy of total reliance upon the nenbutsu as the means of salvation. This would make it a natural for Shinshū (sect) adoption/adaptation in those early days when the lines of Jōdo and Shinshū sectarianism were not so rigidly drawn. In any event it became an important Shinshū holy book early on. Indeed, some Shinshū-sect scholars have wished to prove it a Shinshū-sect originated work. We have no major concern with these matters here. Rather we would delineate the dominant characteristics of the work itself.

Purpose of Writing

The title in itself gives us some inkling of the purpose for writing the *Anjin*. *Anjin*, of course, means peace or assurance of heart/mind; and *ketsujō* signifies settlement, firm establishment, or stabilization. It appears therefore to bespeak the intention of the author to aid the reader to achieve the secure establishment of his or her mind/heart (*shin, kokoro*) in the peace of a full

assurance of faith (in his/her prospects of indubitable birth-*ōjō* 往生-in the Pure Land). As will be developed in the sequel, this is indeed precisely what the *Anjin* attempts to do. There is the repeated and varied use of analogy, figures of speech, authority of past notables, logic, standard Jōdo doctrines, and sermonic exhortation to persuade the readers that they *already* have in their hands the elements necessary for a full, living assurance of their already-achieved salvation. They need only to open their hearts/minds to this sublime truth and let its glad, peaceful assurance permeate their whole beings.

A correlate assumption seems to be justified: This is an in-house document intended mainly, perhaps only, for those already in the fold. It is not a proselytizing document to persuade those outside the faith as to the truth or importance of its message, but to persuade the at least nominal believers in Amida to rise up and in the full assurance of faith (somewhat flagging in those days?) to claim their glorious inheritance. Consequently the reality and existence of Amida, and the result of the Primordial Vow of Bhikkhu Hōzō to bring *all* beings to salvation, are taken for granted as undoubted realities. Amida's ubiquitous splendor and power are taken to be as obvious and beyond doubt as the brilliance and reality of the sunlight. The main thrust of the *Anjin*'s argument is toward a fully existential appropriation of Pure Land beliefs and rituals, toward a triumphant rising up in the fullness of faith to claim the present riches of Amida's infinite grace. Perhaps we might call it a kind of private devotional manual to be read again and again for instruction and inspiration, which might be interestingly compared with other devotional manuals.²

The Nenbutsu Teaching of the "Anjin"

1. The Traditional Base

The basic "theological" position of the *Anjin* clearly fits well into Shinran's interpretation of Hōnen's gospel of salvation. The opening lines, for example, affirm the centrality of the Eighteenth Vow to the total Amidist salvational structure:

The devotee of Jōdo Shinshū should first of all understand the arising of the Primordial Vow. Even though there are forty-eight universal vows, the primary significance is to be given to the Eighteenth (52: 1-2).³

This, of course, is the Vow in which the Bhikkhu Hōzō (Amida-in-the-making) declares that he will not (cannot?) gain the Buddhahood of his

choosing unless thereby any and every living being, no matter how base, can achieve birth in the Pure Land (*ōjō*) by “thinking” of Amida (nenbutsu) even “as few as ten times.” (In the *Anjin*, “*nen*” 念 or think, usually means “to say.”) The core emphasis throughout is on the eternal reality and efficacy of the Name’s saying for human salvation. Its theme song and constant refrain are in celebration of this central religious reality. All of the author’s efforts are bent toward persuasively bringing out the (to him) compelling existential logic of this Truth for believers.

The similarities and differences between the *Anjin* and Shinran’s teaching are intriguing. The central doctrinal stances are practically identical. Such differences as there are seem to be in emphasis rather than substance. Shinran sought to state, refine, and establish Hōnen’s Amidism and reliance on the nenbutsu according to his own understanding of its essence, vis-à-vis other forms of Buddhism. The *Anjin* bypasses or takes for granted most of this, somewhat in the mode of a hortatory sermon which seeks to induce decisive action rather than correct theory; it has no interest in the fine distinctions and peculiar interpretations which Shinran gave to traditional texts. So too the dominant mood of the two differs. Shinran repeatedly declares that he personally, and all men generally, are incurably and deeply sinful. He declares that he has none of the properly joyful emotions of the saved human being. But the *Anjin*, as will be observed later, treats human sinfulness rather easily on the whole and encourages its readers to believe that full and joyful assurance of their presently accomplished salvation should be the *normal* condition of believers in Amida. In this aspect it resembles Ippen more than Shinran, though of a considerably cooler degree of ecstatic emotional fervor.

2. The Primordial Vow

(a) *The Vow’s Infinite Power.* It is essential to understand the basic rationale of the complete all-sufficiency and unlimited efficacy of the Amida-constituting (primordial) Vow that obviates the necessity for humankind to achieve their own salvation. As far as most are concerned, especially in *mappō*, the age of the disappearance of the true Dharma, salvation must be totally the result of Amida’s freely offered grace. One’s own “good works” are totally ineffective; karmic accumulations of salvation-producing merit are useless. Thus:

Even if we make a genuine effort to work on our practice [of virtuous deeds] so as to escape this world of illusions, we will see that we have neither the [necessary] piety or wisdom; and because we lack this wisdom and the necessary practice for enlight-

enment, we can only sink into the fire pits of the three evil realms (153: 2-4).⁴

The point to be made here, however, is that though purposeful karmic action is obviated on the *human* level, and all is of grace, karma is *not* bypassed on the ultimate level. It is indeed the very abundance of Hōzō-Amida's karmic merit which enables him to offer men "free" salvation into the Pure Land (which is ultimately equivalent to enlightenment). That is, Amida's grace is composed of, and produced by, Amida's own meritorious deeds. Hence it is appropriate that the *Anjin* stresses the quantitative and qualitative infinity of Amida's achieved merit. His Primordial Vow was (is) the "fully matured virtue of the fruition of that Buddhahood which is the result of five infinitely long ages (*kalpas*) of thinking-searching." Then there "multiplied millions of years of continued good karmic deeds" specifically accomplished for the unfortunate beings born into future evil ages (220: 1-3). In a climactic assertion, quite in the spirit of Śāntideva's *Path of Light*, the author writes:

As Shaka (the historic Buddha) he has manifested himself as many as 8,000 times in the world during five hundred or so *kalpas* since the ancient past . . . In the billion Buddha worlds there is not a space even the size of a mustard seed where he has not given his life (101: 6-11).

And of course the Ultimate Buddha, Amida, is effulgently omnipresent in the human world, *especially* in *mappō*. So then on the human level the infinite karmic merits of Amida obviate the need for good works. Amida is ready, committed to supplying all the karmic potency needed for enlightenment to every human being, were that person able to provide it on his/her own. Seeming to feel that believers have lost the rightful confidence their faith should give them, the *Anjin* repeatedly asserts the "wide-ranging universality" of the Primordial Vow (102: 2). Zēndō's approval of the Vow on this score, "The great priest lauded this [Vow of Hōzō] as a uniquely universal Vow" (146: 3) is noted with satisfaction. By means of the power of the Vow

the merits of the disciplined practice of the Other-Power Buddha
Essence have been transferred to us who are without goodness.

This applies even to the last age's Dharma slanderers who are said to be unable to produce any merit whatsoever (101: 7-10). How then can *any* individual, no matter how weak and unworthy, consider oneself to be beyond Amida's saving grace? Amida has met inexorable Karma head on and conquered it on behalf of human beings.

(b) *This Universal Salvation is Already Achieved.* A second major feature of the Vow, correlate with its universality and implicit in Amida's Buddhahood, is that all persons are saved at this very moment. Their birth in the Pure Land is assured, whether they know it or not. This was of course not brand new, at least as implication, in the Jōdo tradition. But the author of the *Anjin* seems to feel that it remains implicit and unrealized among the faithful, thus making their "faith" impotent in actuality. Hence his insistent stress on this point. Quite early in the text we read:

However, having perfected the Vow and practice on behalf of living beings, the Buddha has already accomplished our *ōjō* (52:8-9).

In fact the total effort of the *Anjin*, to simplify slightly, is to produce in the believer an existentially effectual faith attitude which will appropriate Amida's salvation here and now. Everything in it is geared to the achievement of this desired result. How shall this be accomplished? In a statement reminiscent of the New Testament passage about the "cloud of witnesses" in the heavens (Hebrews 12: 1), the *Anjin* notes that many have indeed already been borne across to the other shore "as a result of the originating activity of his (Amida's) great compassion" (166: 4-5), in the ten ages since the Vow was fulfilled.

But the presumed achievement of *ōjō* by those in the past neither makes a strong case for present faith, nor is it without problems. For how can Hōzō-Amida's action completed billions of years ago save living beings now, who exist (or re-exist in Buddhist terms) at different times and different places? The possible query as to why in all the ten kalpas since the Vow was perfected all beings have not yet been saved is neither raised nor hinted at. (It may be observed that Christian thinkers have had a similar problem in an even more acute form in trying to show how the pre-Christian saints and prophets could be saved by the death of Christ centuries after their lifetimes.) In any case the *Anjin* acknowledges the problem but insists that

even though there are time differences with respect to living beings, Amida has already accomplished *ōjō* for us [all].

And to make the point more vivid an analogy is used:

It is as when the sun rises: instantly the darkness in all ten directions vanishes. And when the moon rises it is as though [all] of the waters of the world reflect its light at the same moment. For the reflection of the risen moon is carried in the waters; and at the rising of the sun [all] the darkness is of course cleared away.

So far, from a flat earth perspective, the argument seems unexceptionable. But then it goes on:

Therefore one must consider whether the *sun* be risen or not risen. It is unnecessary to ask whether the darkness be cleared away or not (94: 1-13).

One rather expects the evidences of the senses, that the darkness has indeed disappeared, to be the primary evidence of the sun's rising. But that would invert the order of priorities and certainties for the *Anjin*. The primary evidence for human salvation cannot be the subjective experience itself, for how can the believer rest one's basic assurance on changing emotions within one's own self, i.e., on one's own personal sensibility that the darkness has vanished? For the *Anjin* at least the prior and primary reality is the Buddhahood of Amida—the rising of the sun that causes our experience of light—which is the foundation of Pure Land.

There is another turn to the argument that is not immediately apparent, but which strengthens the *Anjin's* logic. It is this: for the Amidist devotee, the indubitable fact of Amida's existence is *per se* the guarantee, the reality, of prior-present accomplishment of human *ōjō*. That is, *ōjō* is intrinsic to, indeed the *raison d'être* of Hōzō-Amida's Buddhahood. For in attaining Buddhahood in terms of the Eighteenth Vow, the *ōjō* of every human being was achieved then and there. The *Anjin* is very emphatic here:

Therefore there is no *ōjō* for the ordinary man *apart* from the enlightenment of [Amida] Buddha. At the very moment the *ōjō* of the living beings of the ten directions [i.e., total universe] was accomplished, the Buddha perfected his enlightenment. Therefore the Buddha's enlightenment and our *ōjō* are accomplished at the same moment (92: 2-4).

Thus the Buddha's enlightenment was-is our enlightenment. Like the "eternal" sun the Enlightened One floats luminously above all our changes of time, circumstance, and rebirths through the ages, available as presently, instantly realizable *ōjō* whenever we sentient beings are ready to accept this light.⁵

(c) *We Can Contribute Nothing to Our Own Salvation*. Implicit in, or correlate to, "already accomplished" *ōjō* is the fact that none of our efforts can actually contribute toward our own salvation—they may indeed prevent it. The *Anjin* is most insistent upon this. We have already briefly noted its disparagement of human spiritual capacities. But this is no perfunctory, passing remark; it is central, the motivational core of the *Anjin's* persuasive technique. Only if Pure Land devotees are fully persuaded of this truth of their

own (*jiriki*) incapacity to gain salvation will they wholeheartedly embrace and act upon the *Anjin*'s proposed remedy—to trust totally and exclusively in the salvational efficacy of Amida's grace. Thus we read:

Amida has already accomplished *ōjō* for us and other than his enlightenment there is nothing that can be added by man.

The author then extends and expands on this basic theme. Because Hōzō-Amida actualized and perfected his Primordial Vow and the practice requisite for its fulfillment, during infinitely long ages,

you should know that there is no further vow and practice by the individual [needed for *ōjō*]; for the Buddha perfected his Vow and practice on behalf of even the lowest of low human beings (130: 1-6).

But lest anyone should think that a vow and practice achieved ten *kalpas* ago should by now need something more to make it effectual in the present, the author notes at a later point:

But even though past, present, and future *ōjō* are not identical, because the Universal Vow which is the true cause of *ōjō* has come into existence and is [now] operating, *there is not one thing*, not one item of faith or practice, which can be added to the Buddha's Vow and practice (176: 2-4).

With some of the implications of this statement we shall need to deal later, but its main thrust is clear: Amida's enlightenment of ten *kalpas* ago remains the eternally sufficient and operative cause of human salvation. "The Buddha's Vow and practice are not something other, they are the very essence of the Vow and practice that produce our *ōjō*" (220: 13). Our karmic debts that prevent our enlightenment have been forever paid in full.

3. Correlates and Implications

The three foregoing propositions are the main body of doctrinal affirmations of the *Anjin*. (1) Hōzō-Amida's Vow was-is absolutely universal, for all men in all times and places. (2) In its accomplishment Amida has already achieved every last being's salvation in all universes for all ages to come. And (3) it is a prime delusion for anyone to think that by one's own efforts (*jiriki*) one can contribute even a dust-mote of substance to one's own salvation. It should again be noted that in one sense these are not doctrinal statements *per se*, certainly not any additions to basic Jōdo, or Shinshū doctrine as enunciated by Shinran. Rather they are only doctrinal emphases and interpretations. This of course does not undercut the importance of the

Anjin development but rather enhances it. The existential interpretation of a doctrine determines whether it will be a genuine element of the living, practiced faith, or the dead letter of the law. We turn therefore to four basic items of this sort.

(a) *Organic Relation of Amida's Vow to Human Salvation*. An important implication is the inclusion of, or better, the ontological identity, of Hōzō-Amida's Buddhahood (enlightenment) with human *ōjō*. The *Anjin* makes this very explicit:

The essential meaning of this passage is: "When the Vow and practice of the living beings in all ten directions shall be accomplished and they shall be born [into the Pure Land], I [Hōzō] will also attain Buddhahood. But if living beings do not achieve *ōjō* then I shall not attain enlightenment. *Therefore the Buddha's enlightenment must of necessity depend on our ōjō* (52: 3-4).

Two other passages make this organic relation even more explicit:

Indeed if even one among all living beings should not attain *ōjō* Buddha could not have achieved his own enlightenment (139:8-9).

Indeed, without the salvation of

every last living being, *including* the "good man" [*jiriki* type], the Vow of great compassion cannot be brought to completion (146: 4-5).

It is difficult to imagine any more sweeping, dramatic statement of the intertwining of sinful being and Perfect Amida. When one thinks of the Buddhist version of the universe, of the infinity of beings in an infinity of universes, who through an infinity of ages have been vainly seeking salvation and will continue to do so through an infinite future, the full force of the "even one" inclusion strikes us.

But what does the author really mean by saying that Amida's enlightenment "depends on" human salvation? The word here translated "depends on" is *yoru* whose basic meaning is a straightforward cause-effect or dependency relation. But it is quite clear that this cannot literally be the case in at least two respects: (1) Hōzō's enlightenment ten *kalpas* ago did not depend upon (result from) actual acceptance of his merits by beings either already or not yet born; (2) since there continue to be unredeemed human beings, now and for ages to come, who have not accepted Amida's grace, neither did that fact prevent Amida's Buddhahood.⁶

Obviously what we have here is a transparently dramatic literary device by which the organic relation of the Vow to human salvation is expressed so as

to achieve a maximum impact—to strengthen faith and to induce believers to act on their faith. All living beings are now *prospectively* or *potentially* saved; nothing more is needed to effect salvation (*ōjō*) than the believer's total faith-acceptance of Amida's grace. We have here a kind of motivational *kōan*, designed to be persuasive—an assertion that Hōzō's achievement of Buddhahood (Amidahood) could not have taken place, that there would have been no Amida had not your and my birth in the Pure Land been thereby guaranteed. Hence that Amida does indeed exist does indeed guarantee our salvation. And in one passage the author asks his readers to think how full of sorrow Shaka Buddha and Amida are that all men do not immediately accept their free gift of grace (201: 1-4). This putting of the matter, of course, is the Pure Land expression of the traditional Buddhist faith that finally every living being will be saved.

(b) *Absolute, Unconditional Tariki Salvation.* The absolute dependence of humankind upon other power (*tariki*) salvation, i.e., total dependence upon the merits that Amida transfers to a person's account, is germane to the Jōdo teaching. But again the *Anjin* exerts itself to the utmost to make an existentially persuasive statement of this principle. Contrasting it with Shinran's development of the same theme it can be said that there is no basic difference in position, but that in Shinran's doctrine of *tariki*, salvation necessarily seems to spring more from human sin and incapacity than in the *Anjin*'s. That is, for Shinran human beings are so centrally sinful, their "best" motives so tainted with selfishness and evil desires, that they are, quite simply, totally unable to achieve their own salvation—quite in keeping with Hōnen's so poignantly expressed sense of moral and spiritual incapacity.

Of course the *Anjin*, as we have seen, does speak of the human lack of either the goodness or wisdom requisite for salvation. But while acknowledging this incapacity it makes less of it, as we shall see, and emphasizes rather the glorious fullness, sufficiency, and absolute ubiquity of Amida through his Vow and Name. It is, so to speak, the all-sufficiency of Amida's grace rather than human incapacity or sin that pushes the human being to accept *tariki* salvation.

The Name, as the vehicle of Amida's power (see next section) for salvation, is interpreted in this same manner. Noting that the *Larger Sūtra* (*Muryōjūkyō*) states that even "those beings who do not clearly hear the name of the Three Treasures (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha)," i.e., are scarcely aware of their existence, during *mappō*, can by one thought (repetition?) of Amida's Name achieve *ōjō*, the *Anjin* goes on to analyze the nature of the causality involved here:

But the moment of the repetition [of the Name] is not the basic-fundamental actualization of *ōjō*. It is the [Primordial] Vow and fragrant practice [of Hōzō-Amida] which are [already effected in the [Amida] Buddha Essence (*buttai*) which actualize the great work of *ōjō* and are manifested at the moment of the single calling of the Name (175: 8-11).

The point here is, of course, that the sayer of the Name is not to presume that the saying of the Name in any way or to any degree however slight, *causes* one's salvation. To suppose this would be a *jiriki* interpretation of the use of the Name, thoroughly corrupting the act and denigrating the complete, ubiquitous power of the Primordial Vow. What really happens in that single, effective voicing of the Name, is to make an opening for its saving power into a human life. All the human being can do is to open the flood-gates of divine power by acknowledging one's own total incapacity and throwing oneself in helpless faith upon Amida's compassion.⁷

(c) *The Nenbutsu: Unique and Exclusive Instrument of Salvation*. In full agreement with Hōnen, Shinran, and Ippen, the *Anjin* considers the *nenbutsu* (the saying-thinking "Namu Amidabutsu") to be the best-only means of salvation during *mappō*. But as usual it gives its own particular, emphatic emphasis and interpretation. The nub of the matter for the *Anjin* is this. The *nenbutsu* is the "incarnated" quintessence of the fulfilled Primordial Vow and requisite practice for its fulfillment and actualization. It is embodied Buddhahood. Its use, in full faith and in total surrender of one's own efforts to attain *ōjō*, is a transubstantiative act by which the saving power of Amida is poured into the life of the believer.

Thus it is that in Zendō's *Gengibun* 玄義文, as quoted by the *Anjin*, we find the assertion, "Now in the *Meditation Sūtra* (*Kangyō*) passage [it is said that] ten sayings [of the Name] are the same as ten vows and the completion of ten practices." And when asked how this mere *nenbutsu*-saying can be the completion of ten saving practices, we have this reply:

"Namu" means to take refuge. Again it has the meaning of "arousing a vow" (i.e., desire for salvation) and "turning over" [karmic merit to the *nenbutsu* reciter]. Now "Amida butsu" (i.e., the *nenbutsu*) is this practice. By means of this one will unfailingly gain *ōjō* (130: 1-4).

It is to be emphasized again that on the ultimate level the saving use of the Name does not bypass either the sinfulness of the sinner nor the eternally established necessity for the fulfillment of the karmic accomplishments for salvation, namely absence of moral flaw and presence of great merit. It is

rather that when one takes refuge in Amida—comes home to him—in the faith-filled saying of his name (in the desperate faith of a drowning person without other hope), then all of the infinite merit of Amida is added to one's account and Pure Land birth (*ōjō*) which irreversibly leads to enlightenment is gained.

(d) *The Effectual Use of the Nenbutsu*. Given the tremendous and unique potency of the nenbutsu as Amida's embodied presence and absolute guarantee of the attainment of *ōjō*, the mode of its proper and effective use is of great importance. The *Anjin's* author did not share Ippen's "blind faith" in the Name, that its very presence on a *fuda* hung round one's neck was bound to have some salvational effect. So too for the *Anjin*, merely its traditional-ritual honoring was of no value, perhaps even a cause of *failing* to gain *ōjō*; it must be rightly used to be efficacious. Only thus can human-kind's ontological, prospective salvation become historical, present actuality. The *Anjin* spells the matter out very clearly:

Just to say the nenbutsu will of course not attain to *ōjō*, when it is not in accord with the significance of the Name. As Donran explained: "To truly comprehend the Name *we must think as we say it*: By virtue of the power of Amida's merit our *ōjō* will be achieved" (166: 9-11).

This emphasis on internal attitude and totality of dependence on Amida is characteristic of all the *Anjin* passages that speak about the right use of the Name.

Three specific types of this general emphasis may be noted. First, the full, personal comprehension of the religious and experiential significance of the Name is necessary for its right use. For the *Anjin* the deliberate, conscious contemplation of this truth of the Pure Land faith apparently is bedrock necessity for proper use of the nenbutsu and will provide the necessary emotional impetus. Over and over again the *Anjin* chides its presumed readers, devotees of Amida, about their ignorance or shallow awareness of this truth, and their consequent failure to truly believe that Amida does indeed fully and *presently* save those who trust him completely:

Now of what are we to be repentantly ashamed? We should be ashamed that we have not heard what the Buddha has done to make us aware of his wondrous Vow. On behalf of common mortals who possess no meritorious roots of goodness, he diligently disciplined himself in the Vow and practice, and as Shaka he has manifested himself as many as 8,000 times in the world during 500 long ages since the ancient past (101: 3-6).

“We should be ashamed” will be discussed later, but the importance of “hearing” must be emphasized here. For, in agreement with Shinran and Shinshū in general, great importance is attached to “hearing” of the right sort. Thus:

To hear “Our *ōjō* has already been accomplished” is not just hearing the Name. To [truly] “hear” is to hear the wondrousness of the Primordial Vow’s Other Power *without doubting*. For we hear the Name as the result of the *accomplishment* of the Original Vow. There is only the single (i.e., single-moment, single-minded) turning to Other Power (146: 8-11).

The thrust of the passage is obvious: Unless the nominal believer in Amida hears the Name in fully existential faith, without the slightest doubt that *one’s own* salvation is now already accomplished, then one has not “heard” it at all in any meaningful sense. The hearing of the Name in that manner is of course the work of Amida’s grace in oneself; it owes nothing to any effort one may have made.

The second specification for the proper use of the Name is a totally *tariki* attitude. The constant emphasis in the *Anjin* on this aspect of the saying of the Name indicates an intense awareness of the dangers of the subtle but pervasive influence of *jiriki* attitudes in the minds of contemporary users of the nenbutsu. The very ardor of a devotee’s use of the nenbutsu, one’s complete belief in it as the exclusive vehicle of his salvation, might lead one to think that multiplied voicings of the Name would increase the likelihood of salvation. (Indeed had not Saint Hōnen himself used the nenbutsu many thousands of times daily?) Or, on the other hand, thinking of nenbutsu-saying as the Pure Land passport, the believer might use it rather casually now and again when in the mood, thereby shoring up his confidence in one’s own salvational prospects from time to time.

But the *Anjin* will have none of this. Such uses of the nenbutsu are *jiriki*-tainted. Such use of the nenbutsu “removes the Buddha [far from them] into the Western Paradise,” rather than making him an intimate, constantly-saving presence. Such nenbutsu sayers put themselves in the position of a vassal who needs to flatter-bribe a seldom-seen lord; they use the Name as a placatory offering and so human beings and Buddha remain estranged. And such users of the Name are constantly flagging in energy, wavering in and out of the practice and their assurance of *ōjō* as well. Thus, in conclusion:

Man’s peace of mind and the great compassion of the Buddha are sundered from each other, and man is always estranged from the Buddha. When this is the case, there is indeed no certainty of *ōjō* (167: 1-12).

Contrasted to this *jiriki* use of the Name is the genuine *tarikī* use:

When faith is awakened in us that “*Namu Amida Butsu*” is indeed the form (or embodiment) in which beyond doubt our *ōjō* is accomplished, then because Amida Buddha himself works our *ōjō*, one voicing of the Name firmly establishes our birth in the Pure Land (139: 3-5).

Clear and definite as this seems to be, there still remains a difficulty of which the *Anjin* is aware. If in reality faith-hearing and faith-saying of the Name are *Amida's* action in us rather than ours toward him, how can we possibly induce or guarantee that our hearing of the Name is true hearing and not mere physical hearing? Must one passively wait till karma and Amida conspire together to produce true faith-hearing in us? The author proposes some psychological aids which, so to speak, may be presumed to open the door to Amida's saving action in us. He does not see these as clever *jiriki* ruses to trick oneself into faith, but simply calls upon the devotee to become fully, immediately aware of the riches of his/her faith. Thus whenever one hears the Name let one think, “Ah, at this very instant my *ōjō* is accomplished!” And “When he reverently worships (A)midabutsu's image he should think ‘Ah, our *ōjō* has indeed been accomplished because this is the blessed form of the accomplished enlightenment of Hōzō Bosatsu’ ” –whose enlightenment was (prospectively) ours also. So too when “Paradise,” i.e. Pure Land, is heard let one think “Ah, he has already actualized the place of our *ōjō*” (138: 3-8). It seems that for the *Anjin's* author such “means” are on the same level as the simple opening of one's eyes and ears and giving that attention which is necessary to sensing the world about us. Here the “world” to be sensed is the true nature of Amida's gift of grace to men.

There is a further question here that is never tackled directly by the *Anjin* though it is inherent in the faith-hearing concept. Namely, how does the believer know when one *has* rightly heard the Name and seen the Form (of Amida) in faith? Is there some confirming awareness or sense of joy? One passage does speak to the matter, though a bit indirectly:

In the *Byōdōgakukyō* 平等覺經⁸ it is said that we leap in joy and feel the rising of the body-hairs [in ecstasy] when we hear the exposition of the Pure Land teaching. This is no meaningless gladness. . . For when we realize the joyousness of the fact that the Vow and practice have been perfected by the Buddha and that the supreme enlightenment, in which *ki* and *hō* are one has been accomplished, our delight is so great that we leap up to dance through an excess of gladness.

The *Anjin* goes on to say that now “we do not see the Name as far away” but as having “right now” perfected our *ōjō*, and Amida’s image “as that blessed form we shall have in the Pure Land.” Such is *true* hearing and seeing (153: 1-9). But the whole context of the quotation gives the sense that “this is what *should* be occurring in Pure Land believers; it was the experience of the saints of the past.” And even when there are such emotions accompanying the hearing and seeing, the results of opening the awareness to the doctrines of Pure Land faith, are they the infallible, convincing evidences of true faith, the witness of “the warming of the heart” experienced by John Wesley?

There is one other possible *Jōdo* (Shinshū?) means of assurance at hand, the nenbutsu *samādhi*. One development of this in some circles at least was the repetition of the Name for hours and days on end until Amida’s likeness appeared to the devotee. And in the *Meditation Sūtra* such a vision was the climax of a long structured meditational sequence which began with gazing at the setting sun in the west (toward the Western Paradise) and the progressive visualization of Pure Land glories.

But here something less ecstatic and visionary seems to be in mind. One passage defines the nenbutsu *samādhi* (*zanmai*) as simply concentrating on the nenbutsu (220: 5-6). Again we read the following:

The person who desires to establish the mind in faith by means of the nenbutsu *samādhi* must realize that the body is Namu Amida Butsu and that the mind also is Namu Amida Butsu (158: 1-2).

The rest of the passage goes on to spell out the non-separation of the human bodily substance and mental flux from the pervasive compassion and saving activity of Amida, and to protest against all separation of humankind and Amida as a *jiriki* heresy, because by such thoughts humankind seeks to make something of themselves which they are not. The strongest of the nenbutsu *samādhi* passages refers to a Vajrabodhi⁹ who, by meditating exclusively on a pool of water, became “pool-like” in his body, thus uniting body and mind as “one element.” Consequently

If the realization of nenbutsu *samādhi* be developed, both the mind and body merge into the nenbutsu; when the realization of these words takes place, the saying of “Namu Amida Butsu” becomes the nenbutsu of the lovely Universal Vow (159: 5-8).

Just perhaps this suggests a mildly semi-transcendent experience of the unity of a human being and Amida. But if so, such experiences, or any visions of the enthroned Amida surrounded by Pure Land splendors, seem to be of small consequence for the *Anjin*. Rather we seem to have but a somewhat more

intense and concentrated version (for the very devout?) of the emotions to be felt by the ordinary lay believers when they give themselves to fully realizing and existentially appropriating for thought and action the oneness of their own evanescent historical self (*ki*) and Amida (*hō*) to be found in the nenbutsu.

The Unity of Human Beings and Amida

According to the late Fujiwara Ryōsetsu it was the *Anjin* that projected the *kihō ittai* doctrine or term into Shinshū consciousness even though coined by Shōkū (1176-1246), Seizan Founder.¹⁰ As suggested, it refers to the unity (*ittai*, 一体 one-body) of *ki* 機, the evanescent, imperfect historical existence exemplified by human beings, and *hō* 法 (dharma) quintessentially present in Amida as realized Buddhahood. And the term plays a significant role in the *Anjin's* total message. It provides a graphically powerful assurance for the believer who desires to draw near to Amida, far from human sin-impurity in a Pure Land enthronement. For it maintains that a human being as one who needs rescue from this samsaric (*rinne* 輪廻) plight is actually united, *in some manner*, with the eternally blessed Dharma.

But to fully evaluate this teaching here, we must observe both its Mahāyāna context and its interpretation. There has been from its early years an important strand of the teaching of the essential oneness of humankind and Buddha within Mahāyāna. Zen, of course, has taken the presence of the Buddha-nature in every person as its main position, governing its practice. *Satori* is essentially the discovery of this fact.

Against this general Mahāyāna background, very pronounced in Japanese Buddhism, we hear the strangely discordant notes of Hōnen's and Shinran's anguished laments over their own, and humankind's, sinful separation from the virtue and purity of the Buddha and his Way. As suggested earlier, Shinran extends his own sense of the sinful worthlessness of all his actions to humankind at large. Human beings as such are *incapable* of truly righteous actions; all their actions are tainted by the poisons of greed, anger, and delusion. Shinran was surely a spiritual kinsman of St. Paul in his cry, "Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me out of this body of death" (Rom. 7:24)?

In contrast, the *Anjin's* portrayal of human failure is curiously mild beside Shinran's. As noted before it does state more than once that men have neither the requisite roots of goodness or the wisdom to attain Buddhahood. But the main repentance to which its readers are urged is for their failure to take Amida at his word—a failure more of neglect and ignorance than of deep-dyed sinfulness, even though many times repeated in past

existences. Hence it seems legitimate to suggest that the writer of the *Anjin*, whether consciously or not, felt the traditional Mahāyāna need to bring people and Buddha more closely together again, to mend the web of Buddha-man unity which had been weakened, even torn, by Hōnen and Shinran—and yet to do it in the Pure Land context.

The prime vehicles for doing this are two: First there is the insistently urged doctrine of Amida's fully effectual capacity in his "embodiment" in the nenbutsu, to guarantee to the faith-full believer the full, present accomplishment of one's own *ōjō*. Of this we have already spoken.

The second is the doctrine of *kihō ittai* now under consideration. This represents the underpinning and reality of Amida's living reality in the nenbutsu practice; it is a statement of the fact and the mode of Amida's powerful presence in the Name. Thus:

The man who desires to establish the faith-mind by means of the nenbutsu samādhi must realize that the [his] body is Namu Amida Butsu and that the [his] mind is also Namu Amida Butsu. . . Even when the body is perceived as separable into tiny particles [as in Hīnayana Buddhism], there cannot be a single particle that is not impregnated by the merits of the fully perfected Buddha. And so the body in which there is the unity (*ittai*) of the to-be-saved (*ki*) and the saving Dharma essence (*hō*) is also Namu Amida Butsu.

And even though the mind "is completely full of evil passions and accompanying delusions," and even though we perceive the mind to be "changing-disappearing and fragmenting at every instant" there is not a single fragment or instant "into which the Vow and practice of the calling of the Name have not been distributed" (158: 1-8). Thus the human being is instinctively filled with Amida's grace for salvation in every particle and moment of one's existence as body-mind. We seem very close to affirming the presence of the Buddha (nature?) in everyone.¹¹

Despite this terminology *kihō ittai* can scarcely qualify as an ontological unity of the usual Mahāyāna sort, which already present only has to be realized in *satori*. For the *Anjin* is quite in earnest about the incapacity of human beings to save, i.e. enlighten, themselves. And even its proffered assurance of the attainment of *ōjō* is not equivalent to immediate enlightenment. Instant transformation of character is not envisioned, and birth into the Pure Land brings full enlightenment only after many millennia spent there.

What we have here is rather a functional, salvational unity, an operational device for overcoming the vast distance which Pure Land "cosmology" (infinitely far-off Paradise in the West) and "anthropology" (deeply sinful

humanity) had injected into a Mahāyāna Buddhist sect (Jōdo). The “unity” of *kihō ittai* is that of the mutually irresistible attraction of two religious extremes for each other: human beings’ utter incapacity to save themselves and Amida’s infinite compassion and purity. It is the plenum of grace rushing into the void of complete weakness and unworthiness. The sinful nothingness of human beings irresistibly calls forth Amida’s grace which “needs” sinners to fulfill itself, and is the purpose of its “creation.” Indeed in one sense the *Anjin* is nothing more or other than a celebration of the absolute goodness and ubiquity of Amida’s grace. Whatever the depth or nature of human failure, Amida’s grace is more than sufficient.

Some Christian Comparisons

Religious “comparisons” are always dubious and difficult because of the near impossibility of finding bases or terms of comparison which properly interpret *both* sides of the comparison. In this particular instance there is a further difficulty: the Buddhist item is a very narrow and specific entity, namely the *Anjin*, a product of one school of thought and of one person. “Christian” includes various traditions and two millennia of varying interpretations. An effort will be made here to confine “Christian” primarily to its biblical portrayal.

1. Similarities

(a) *Human Incapacity to Achieve Salvation.* The inability of unaided human beings to save themselves is equally marked in both cases. That perception of the world is the *sine qua non* of most religion to be sure, but it is especially noteworthy in the two present instances. For the *Anjin*, human beings have neither the wisdom or virtue to save themselves; one cannot possibly accumulate the merit to offset the many previous existences of mixed good and evil. One has been born with a corrupted past, inherent in one’s present embodiment. As for the Christian, Adam’s disobedience has become part and parcel of his/her being. Consequently “all have fallen short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23), i.e., are incapable of saving themselves from condemnation by divine justice, and of achieving genuine righteousness.

The usually drawn contrast between Buddhist ignorance and Christian sin, endemic to the human condition, cannot be clearly seen here, for the *Anjin* scarcely mentions ignorance save in the form of the believers’ shameful ignorance of the riches of their own tradition, or in very *general* assertions about human ignorance.

(b) *The Need for Massive Infusions of Merit/Righteousness.* In the Buddhist context, as we have observed, the impossibility of self-powered salvation is due to the lack of sufficient merit-virtue to gain enlightenment. For while Mahāyāna opened up the possibility of unlimited and final enlightenment (Buddhahood) to all men, it also by degrees and in various forms multiplied the stages thereunto and magnified the scale thereof. Indeed Jōdo was a protest against this very development. But as has been noted, *somehow* the karmic price must be paid.

The New Testament tradition, on the Christian side, stemming from the Jewish sacrificial cultus, was the conception of human beings as sinners against their fellow beings and their God—indeed as *essentially* a sinner against God. Their sins must be blood-atoned. As in the *Anjin* the sufficient sum of karmic merits must somehow be gained before a human being can gain *ōjō*, so in the New Testament a supreme sacrifice is required for salvation from eternal death. (To some extent there seems to be here a contrast between Buddhist quantity and Christian quality; later the medieval Christian church somewhat remedied the situation with its doctrines of calculated merits!)

And in each case there is of course a redeemer. In the *Anjin* it is Amida who out of his infinite store of merit compassionately provides freely to the worst of sinners sufficient merit to gain birth into the Pure Land Paradise. In the New Testament it is Christ, the God-man on the cross, who pays the price of the redemption of all men from sin into eternal life, even of the thief on the cross beside his cross.

(c) *Repentant Faith Alone Effectualizes the Grace of Amida and Christ.* It is also true in each case that human beings can contribute nothing essential to their own salvation but repenting-accepting faith. As the *Anjin* repeatedly stresses, human beings cannot add a single saving deed of their own; even faith in Amida is Amida's grace working in their hearts. In the New Testament the death of Christ, the sinless one, is what saves humankind, not their own goodness or penances. Some American revivalist hymns portray this graphically: "Jesus paid it all, all to him I owe," and "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling."

There is a slight qualification here on the *Anjin* side, however. As noted, birth into the Pure Land (*ōjō*) is graded according to the merit/demerit of those so born. The lowest of the nine grades of men are born in the outermost reaches of the Pure Land, and only after long ages spent in lotus blossom "prisons" do they achieve enlightenment in Amida's presence.

(d) *Primordial Nature of Amida's Enlightenment and Christ's Sacrifice.* Both redeeming sacrifices—Amida's long ages of self-denying benevolence and

Jesus' crucifixion—are viewed as primordial. Hōzō-Amida's achievement of Buddhahood is indeed placed in a "historical" framework to harmonize with the Buddhist schema of Buddhahood as achieved by men. But the ten kalpas ago that it was gained make it eternal for religious devotion, an integral part of primordial reality.

The Christian case is more complex. Jesus' death is considered to be a genuinely historical event in the New Testament—and by most Christians. Yet in believing Christ's death to be genuinely redemptive of all men, the New Testament authors had to give it a trans-historical efficacy. The book of Hebrews portrays it as an entering into the heavenly sanctuary by the sinless High Priest, who there sacrifices himself for all men, in a once-for-all and completely sufficient manner. The Lamb of God was "slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev.13: 8), foreseen, foreordained by God from the beginning.¹²

2. Contrasts

(a) *The Temporal Scale.* Despite the eternal, primordial likenesses of the salvation offered by Amida and Christ, the time-scale context of the two sets of actions differs radically. The Buddhist context is that of the beginningless and endless rebirths of sentient beings in a meaningless and endless world process. One's present life is but one tiny link in an endless chain, important only insofar as human birth offers opportunity for escape. There have been, and will be, infinite opportunities to accept or reject salvation, though the infrequency of human birth gives one's present life a certain urgency, because it is so rare and offers the only hope of escape from *samsāra* (birth-death). The *Anjin*, however, makes little or nothing of this last factor. It does recognize the unusually evil plight of those who (since the eleventh century C.E. by prevalent reckoning) are now living in *mappō*, and urges immediate action.

The urgency of the Christian-conceived situation of humankind, however, is inherently much greater, which cannot but determine the whole pattern of Christian action in significantly different ways. In the Christian view a human being has but one short uncertain life in which to decide one's eternal fate—a stark choice between salvation in heaven or damnation in hell. To be sure, post-biblical Catholic palliatives have been added in the form of temporary purgatory (like Buddhist hells) and a pleasant-but-not-saved limbo for noble pagans. Even so the two perspectives remain radically different.

And of course the Christian faith in the final revelation of Christ is firmly rooted in an actual dateable life, that of Jesus of Nazareth. This made the problem of the salvation of pre-Christian era saints a difficult one, not really

dealt with in the New Testament. Again later developments solved this problem by various devices such as the virtual-implicit presence of Christ the redeemer in the pre-Christian ages in the activity of the eternally triune God, through Moses and the prophets. But again the difference of historical perspective cannot but affect the total religious quality of the two faiths: on the one side eternal person in an eternal world process, on the other side one-life person in a short lived universe.¹³

(b) *Kihō ittai is not God-man Incarnation.* A second important difference of mood or tendency seems evident in the relation of Amida to human beings, and of God to human beings. The *kihō ittai* unity of Amida and human beings is quite different from the God-human incarnation. God did become a human being in Christ in a manner not clearly defined in the New Testament. But even in later creeds the orthodox statement was divine-human unity without “confusion” of substances. That is, God is still God, and humankind is still humankind. Those Christian mystics like Eckhart who sought to interpret the God-man unity of the Christ *likeness* of the believer in too unitive a fashion were considered on the verge of heresy. In the *Anjin*, as already noted, the Pure Land split between human beings and the Buddha (Amida) is the starting point, but its reality and importance are continually undercut by Amida’s ubiquitous presence in sinful, evanescent human beings, functionally restoring the Mahāyāna doctrine of the Buddha-nature *inherent* in all sentient beings, a rank Christian heresy so to speak.

(c) *Salvational Ethical Imperatives Vary.* Finally, though this is perhaps controversial, the ethical imperative seems more explicitly grounded in the achievement of Christian salvation than in the Amidist act of faith-hearing. St. Paul’s exclamatory phrase can serve as the Christian motif: “Shall we [who have been redeemed by Christ’s death] continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid” (Rom. 6: 1). He goes on to ask how those who have “died to sin” can any longer live therein. Conversion is presumed to issue in sin-free conduct—sainthood in other words.

Language of this sort would be foreign to the *Anjin*. In part this is rooted in the general Buddhist concept of human beings as ignorant rather than “sinful” and hence to be judged more leniently. Besides, karma punishes people for their misdeeds, though sometimes tardily. Human beings are more in need of compassion than of condemnation. In addition, the *Anjin* is so eager to assure its readers that even in *mappō* salvation is ready at hand in the mercies of Amida, that little else matters. Men are to be saved despite and in the midst of their sin; in the vast ranges of the Pure Land during long ages to come their transformation into Buddhahood will be wrought! That the Christian ethical prescription is often aimed at converts, and the *Anjin* is

directed to those who already believe, only slightly modifies this conclusion. The same ethical demand is made upon those who already believe in Christ.

In the final analysis the similarities here noted are existential-experiential and functional, but operative in two quite distinct and variant traditions with radically different presuppositions, goals, and results.

Notes

1. The text used for translation here is that provided by Okamura Genyu (1964). Okamura (p. 1) considers the *Anjin* to most likely be a product of the Seizan Jōdo sect, from someone of the Fukakusagi 深草義 persuasion. He sketches the life of Kenni Dōkyōshi 顯意道教師 (1239-1304) the formulator of the classic statement of Fukakusagi, and notes Kenni's interpretations of many of the key terms in the *Anjin*. He was both a well-known scholar and an ardent practitioner of the nenbutsu.
2. Interestingly, Yamamoto (1968, p. 168) cautions the reader of the *Anjin* thus: "What is needed is care and to beware, as in the case of the *Tannishō*, always to read it from the standpoint of Shinran. Otherwise, we may, instead of finding gold, lose the Way." The reference is to Rennyō's encomium on the *Anjin* as being a kind of gold mine. Is Yamamoto's concern a Shinshū scruple about using a Jōdo-originated document, or due to present Shinshū uncertainties about its "heterodoxy?"
3. Numbers after translated passages indicate pages and lines in Okamura's *hiragana* transcriptions of the text.
4. "Fire pits of the three nether realms" refers of course to the hot hellish-purgatories in the three realms of existence beneath the human realm.
5. There is a curious reverse twist to this logic. In one passage it is said that while we may have doubts about Amida's enlightenment, we should have none about our own *ōjō*. This is because, according to Amida's Vow, he "would never have entered enlightenment if a single being should remain unsaved." That he made that Vow obviously guaranteed the *ōjō* of even the worst sinner (139: 6-7).
6. Some Buddhist interpreters suggest that since the number of living beings is infinite in number, their diminution by finite numbers of those achieving enlightenment (or Pure Land rebirth) can never totally exhaust the sum of sentient beings. Hence Amida's "full attainment" of enlightenment will never be accomplished. Yet, on the other side the *Anjin* (201: 3-4) says that if "even one person" believes in the Vow

- “the grace of the Buddha would be recompensed.”
7. The attractiveness of such a doctrine to the “religiously under-privileged” classes to whom “Kamakura Buddhism” appealed, i.e., the lower social classes who had been largely bypassed by court and aristocratic Heian Buddhism, would of course be strong.
 8. One of the five extant Chinese translations of the *Larger Sukhāvati-vyūha Sūtra*, an originally Sanskrit sutra whose Chinese translation alone is extant. See T. 12, No. 361, 279-299.
 9. Traditionally an Indian Buddhist, Kongōchi in Japanese (671-741), who is said to have introduced Shingon esoteric Buddhism to China.
 10. In a personal letter some time in the late 1960s. Professor Fujiwara taught for some years at Ryūkoku University in Kyoto and was the author of several books on Shinshū thought and practice.
 11. There are a number of other statements of Amida’s closeness to humanity. Amida’s pity for us “penetrates into the very marrow of our bones” (187: 2-3). It is like the fire that has become intrinsic to burning charcoal (187: 2-6). The mental, oral, bodily deeds of those who trust in the Buddha’s virtues become one with the Buddha’s (200: 1-4). When we take refuge in Amida, and our actions thus “rest on” Amida’s “body,” i.e., his essential reality, then “our bodies are no longer separated from the Buddha’s nor our minds from his” (222: 1-2).
 12. Though the New English Bible translation does not directly connect “slain” and “from the foundation of the world,” it does state that the slain Lamb keeps the names of the faithful “in his roll of the living, written there since the world was made.” For the writers of Hebrews (11:25) Christ’s sacrifice was “once and for all at the climax of history.” And for I Peter 1:20, Christ (and his redemptive death), “predestined before the foundation of world, was made manifest in this last period.”
 13. So too the New Testament “time of the end” was very short and utterly final; *mappō* was to be for thousands of years, and *perhaps* repeatable in some future world age.

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