

# Shinran and Contemporary Thought

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## *The Secularization Problem*

I ONCE HAD the privilege of hearing Arnold Toynbee (1889–1975) lecture on the problem of dealing with population concentration in the cities. I had never met the famous historian and I remember that I attended with the intention of getting a look at him. As it happened, his remarks provided me with a number of valuable and helpful insights. He spoke about the effect massive concentrations of people have on the spirit of man. The pollution problem had not yet achieved the wide recognition it has today, and he focussed mainly on how the human spirit could be warped by this phenomenon of urban population concentration. Today, the pollution of the world's cities has turned our attention away from this even graver threat to our humanity. No clue to the solution of the questions Toynbee raised has yet been found. The problem is in fact assuming even more serious proportions.

In the case of earthquakes, the closest attention is paid to slight changes in the earth's crust. Formidable efforts are marshalled to foretell an approaching calamity. But when it comes to cracks and depressions of the

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\* This is the second chapter of author's *Shinran to Gendai* (Shinran Today), published in 1974 by the Chūōkōronsha, Tokyo. In the preface, the author writes: "Through the reflection on the awakening and deepening of his faith in the encounter with Hōnen, Shinran's religious life shaped a logic with a depth all its own. In this book, I explain, through Shinran's works, this 'logic of Faith-Joy,' and discuss the relations between Shinran's thought, the problem of secularization in contemporary civilization whereby person to person relationships are being lost, and the existential philosophies and theologies which try to face these problems."

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spirit, it is as if everybody has determined to take no notice of the danger until the catastrophe is upon us. And it could well be that the most culpable pollution problem is that we have steered the issue away from the spiritual level, indicated by Toynbee, to the realm of the merely material.

Some might dismiss Toynbee's remarks as the fanciful musings of a historian. But the impression I came away with was that I had come into contact with a true historian in the line of Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965), a man who, through the historical study of the past, had managed to extend severalfold his range of vision into the future. There was one more reason for my receptivity to Toynbee's ideas that day: I had just returned from a stay in America, where the urban population problem was already acute.

At about that same time, *The Secular City* (1965), a book by Harvey Cox, a professor of theology at Harvard University, had aroused wide interest even beyond the confines of the theological world. It soon became the center of a big controversy, which was later recorded in a book, *The Secular City Debate* (1966). The problem of the secular city became a *cause célèbre*. I shall have to come back to this later, but the problem in broad outline is as follows. The concentration of populations in big cities, especially in America, has led to a situation whereby groups of cities along, for example, the Eastern seaboard of the United States—cities from Boston, through New Haven, New York, Philadelphia, and all the way to Washington—show signs of fusing in the future into a long chain which will turn the cities into a megalopolis and their society into one of a specifically urban nature. The question is, what becomes of religion in such a situation? The fact that in such a society religion becomes secularized has been set forth as the most fundamental problem. With the secularization of culture as a whole, the social structure itself becomes secularized. As a result, religious phenomena take on a different meaning. For example, while the distinction and opposition between the sacred and profane, long considered to be the most basic of religious categories, are eroded, those things like religious ceremonies, once held in some sense sacred in that society, lose all their meaning.

In such a secularized society, religion cannot maintain the old forms, no matter how hard it tries. The flood of secularization is too strong and rapid. As a result, the meanings of the church buildings, the holy days, and the like undergo a brusque transformation. How can cities survive, and, on the other hand, how can religion—especially in Western society,

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Christianity—survive in the midst of such secularization? That is the problem.

A few years earlier, John Robinson's *Honest to God* (1963) had already tackled the problem from a similar point of view. He used the expression "honest to God" in its literal sense of "man sincere in his relationship with God." What standpoint should contemporary man take, he asked, if he wants to have such a relationship? This work had a big impact, and has gone on to become the best-selling theological work of the century. Another book entitled *Honest to God Debate* (1963), containing the reactions of various scholars to Robinson's work, has also appeared.

At present, shifts in theological fashion are rapid: changes occur overnight, almost like the fashions in hemline or hairstyle. Still, the significance of the problem broached by Bishop Robinson remains. One could even compare his book to a flower blooming before its season; once one flower blooms, many others will follow. It is not so much depth of thought we find, as a reflection of change in the spiritual climate.

Among the articles collected in the *Honest to God Debate* is one by Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976). He published a separate appraisal of Robinson's ideas, *Der Gottesgedanke und der moderne Mensch* (The Idea of God and Modern Man), which appeared originally in 1963 in a theological journal. Although written in response to Robinson's book, it is, on the level of ideas, more important than the work it comments on. It is worth noting, then, how Bultmann evaluates the problem introduced by Robinson.

Right from the beginning Robinson addresses himself to the great change the idea of God has undergone in the mind of modern man. Traditionally, God had been thought of as dwelling "in Heaven," somewhere "up there." But ever since modern man came to see the earth as a round globe rotating on its own axis and revolving through space, the up-down distinction lost its absolute meaning. The idea of God thus changed, and God's existence came to be placed, not "up there" any more but "out there," outside, in a direction away from the earth. God's transcendence thus changed its direction from above, in the heavens to outside the world. Since Ptolemy's geocentric world view gave way to Copernicus's heliocentric system, the "out there" or "beyond" idea became central, and the symbolism of God "up there" lost its potency.

When we reflect carefully on the representations we have today of the

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Transcendent (no matter how vague these are) and on the concepts which common sense relates to it, we cannot help conceding that there is something in them, even though we may not feel inclined to swallow them whole. Robinson contends, however, that the Transcendent, as it exists in the contemporary way of thinking—supposing we can still really conceive of it today—has turned into something that can no longer be adequately expressed by the traditional world “transcendence.” For, he argues, the Transcendent in the metaphysical sense (at least in the philosophy of modern times) is regarded as something that goes beyond the present sensual world, as one pole in the opposition of the Yonder Shore (the intellectual, the rational) and the This Shore (the sensual, the material). For us today, though, beyondness of this sort is rapidly losing its meaning.

As a matter of fact, Robinson is not alone in this view. He has been strongly influenced by Paul Tillich (1886–1965), to the extent that he has even been criticized as being too Tillichean. On many points, his idea of God can, indeed, be traced back to Tillich's systematic theology. The real reason, then, that Robinson's ideas caused such a stir lies in the fact that he was making his outspoken and provoking statements as a bishop of an important See in London. When we look more carefully, we find that his thought is not really so new: it has been greatly influenced, not only by Bultmann and Tillich, but also by Bonhoeffer, a theologian to whom we shall refer later on.

A religious editor of the New York Times met Tillich (shortly before his death) in order to hear his opinions on these questions; then he went to Germany to interview the elder but still hale giants, Karl Barth (1886–1973) and Bultmann; finally, he crossed over to England to meet Robinson and several other religious figures. With a reporter's skill and engaging style, he wrote down his findings in an highly interesting book, *The New Theologian* (1965) which became a general introduction to the subject. As he mentioned in his book, these problematics gave rise in America to the idea of the “Death of God,” which initiated a new trend in theology. The “Death of God” Theology has also been introduced to Japan. It involves many problems which must be studied in their own right. One of these, to which I will refer in passing later on, is the question of how this theology differs from European atheism or nihilism, and in which points it shows American characteristics. In Harvey Cox's *The Secular City*, the problem of atheism is deliberately left untouched in order to think out from an

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entirely new angle the problem of religion's meaning in the modern secularized world. In his later works, however, Cox approaches the atheism of Germany's Ernst Bloch (1885–1977), whose philosophy, especially as expressed in *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (The Hope Principle), he then uses as an underpinning for his own ideas. But we cannot go into these questions here.

### *The World and the Beyond: The Hither Shore and the Yonder Shore*

Bultmann's advocacy of "demythologization" (*Entmythologisierung*) as a method for the interpretation of Scripture, which dates from the end of the Second World War, is quite well known. He uses the worldview of the New Testament as a prime example. In the Bible, the world is presented as consisting of three layers: the celestial, the underworld, and the world of man. (Robinson calls this the three-storied or three-decker universe.) The New Testament posits such a universe on the belief that, within this whole, the world of man is frequently visited by suprahuman powers coming from the celestial or underworld layers. To cite only one example, it is believed that man's illnesses are the work of evil spirits from the underworld. According to Bultmann, a worldview based on that diagram is presented by the New Testament as self-evident, but that does not mean it belongs to the contents of faith in the sense of being something upon which modern man should base his life.<sup>1</sup>

A similar way of thinking is at work in the ideas of Robinson. But Robinson is not satisfied, like Bultmann, with simply removing the mythological constructions of an old worldview. He stresses the point that, in each age, the philosophico-scientific worldview and the concepts of God (or the Transcendent) must positively correspond to each other. In the article quoted above, Bultmann expresses his agreement with Robinson's

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<sup>1</sup> Bultmann's demythologizing process aims at: (a) eradicating this kind of mythological worldview and view of life, which has lost its relevance in present times, and thereby removing from the scriptural content these elements that constitute for modern man an unwarranted obstacle to the acceptance of the faith; (b) reinterpreting the myth by means of existential philosophy, in these cases where the myth expresses something which religious existence experienced on a transcendent level; (c) bringing out in fuller relief, by means of these processes, the full shape of the specific "scandal" of Christianity. The last point in particular is seen by Bultmann as the central task of his Bible exegesis.

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ideas, and goes on to develop, from his own standpoint and in connection with the atheism of Nietzsche and Heidegger, his idea of how modern man's concept of God has changed.

I am convinced that all this applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the doctrines of today's Shin sect, where we face the question of how to conceive of the beyondness of the "Pure Land Paradise in the West." Also with regard to this tenet as expressed in the *shihō-rissō* (literally, indicating direction and setting up form) doctrine, the question of what this Pure Land Paradise and its transcendence can mean for modern man from the standpoint of Shin faith must be reexamined in a novel and contemporary way.

Robinson honestly confesses that he himself, as a modern man, cannot take seriously the idea that God is "up there." Thence, he tries to rethink what it could mean that God is in heaven or again that God is transcendent. And, especially under the influence of Tillich, he concludes that God, as a transcendent being, transcends as it were in the direction of the depths of the human spirit, rather than transcending to the outside. In this way he tries, with Tillich, to think of God as the ground of being.

For Tillich, in his existential-ontological way of thinking, God is, on the one hand, the dark but creative "deeper layer" within man's self-awareness, which embraces the realm of the unconscious—including, for example, the Jungian collective unconscious—and, on the other hand, the ground of being, the transcendent ground of all existence, lying still deeper at the bottom of that inwardness. By adopting that way of thinking, Robinson tries to locate the question of transcendence at the depths of his own inwardness. When we compare Robinson's ideas with those of Tillich, we miss in Robinson that kind of depth, that insight into the dynamic structure of the deepest level of existence that we find in Tillich. For Tillich, the problem of the ground of being—or, for man, the foundation of life—always implies a sort of ambiguity or mystery. Tillich is always conceptually joining two conflicting aspects: on the one hand, the problem of his own ground having something terrifying for man, something that makes him shrink back when he catches sight of it; on the other, the aspect of this ground being that in which man has his source, and the seeing of which makes him a true man (*Existenz*). Robinson does not delve into this so deeply. In his thinking of the transcendence at the depths of man, he is in a sense much nearer to Bultmann, and it could be said that his is an attempt to rationalize Tillich.

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Be that as it may, we can certainly say that God and man unite in a new way when God is considered to be acting as the ground of man. The traditional representation of heaven could in this sense even be interpreted in such a way as to become a symbolic expression of the harmony in the foundational unity of God and man. But can we be satisfied with this? Buddhists will have to ponder that selfsame problem, though from their own distinctive viewpoint.

The question raised above may show us the relevancy of these problematics for Buddhism: Is it allowable, in Pure Land doctrine, to think in such a way about the transcendence of the Pure Land Paradise in the West? Personally I approach this problem in a rather different way. I am of the opinion that, in relation to man, God (or the Transcendent) is indeed "up there," a reality dwelling above, or at least implying something which makes it unavoidable to symbolize it in that way. For it seems to me that as long as man's being is determined by his bodily existence, man cannot help thinking of God as being "up there," even in the face of contemporary physics—that is, even as man's view of nature acclimatizes itself to the relativity theory and atomic physics, the Copernican revolution long past.

Also, when it comes to the "world beyond," the "yonder shore," or, for me as a Pure Land believer of extremely conservative markings, the Pure Land Paradise, I cannot help attaching extreme importance to the meaning of transcendence implied in the idea of *shihō-rissō*, that all things are forms of ultimate truth. For that which is also transcendent (or "yonder shore") to the world, cannot be a transcendent reality in the sense simply of God over against man, that is, envisaged exclusively from the viewpoint of the man-God relationship. It has to be understood equally in its relationship to the world—as a world over against a world as well as a Thou over against an I. True transcendence necessarily comprises the meaning of transcendence over the world. For me, transcendence must always have a "Thou" aspect, transcendent with regard to religious *Existenz* ("I"), and, at the same time, an aspect of a yonder shore, transcendent in regard to the world.

In his early period, the period of *Being and Time* (1926) and *The Essence of Ground* (1929), Heidegger saw world-transcendence as human existence ecstatically going out of and beyond itself into the world, and the world correspondingly opening up in its non-designative truth-totality and be-

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coming world, "worlding."<sup>2</sup> In that way, through *Existenz* as being-in-the-world, the emergence of the historical world is made possible. In the early Heidegger, the problem of transcendence is thus considered solely from the standpoint of such a self-transcendence. In his later period, Heidegger's thinking is markedly inspired by Greek art, which becomes for him the model of reality. He conceives of a halo behind all works of art, something like the aureoles or background of light depicted behind the Buddha statues. He sees this as the world. Such a world is, of course, a place where man can really dwell (*wohnen*). There man is given from time to time a wink from the gods above and, while he dwells on earth as man (that is, a being that must die) there is in man's earthliness something that makes it plausible to see a chthonic pulling force at work in him. Bultmann, however, as we shall see later, does not accept the interpretation of the world as such a *Geviert* (quadrate or fourfold) harmony of heaven and earth, gods and men. It is enough, therefore, to consider here, as premises of his existential theology, the transcendence of the *Existenz* as being-in-the-world, and the historicity which this entails.

Originally, however, the idea of "world-transcendence" implies the idea of a world beyond this world, the viewpoint of a world-to-world relationship. The Transcendent, like the Yonder Shore, must contain the aspect of being a world beyond, and standing over against this world. Transcendence implies a "from-to" element, which must involve not only a transcendence from this shore to the yonder shore, but equally a transcendent working, "advening"<sup>3</sup> to this shore from the yonder shore. Transcendence is then bound to be the encounter of these two processes. This is how a world-to-world relationship is truly realized.

In brief, the idea of transcendence contains three elements: the Transcendent, *Existenz*, and the world; and the meaning of a transcendent world cannot be omitted from the idea of transcendence. If Jaspers is right in viewing the Transcendent and *Existenz* as a pair, then it must also be said

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<sup>2</sup> "Non-designative" here stands for Heidegger's *unbedeutsam* (insignificant): transcending the realm of particular signification—"worlding" refers to "welten," which implies the notion of rotation—*Translator's note*.

<sup>3</sup> "Advene" stands for the Japanese *shōrai suru* 将来する, wherein the Heideggerian meaning of *Zu-kunft* is taken up: the future as coming towards, the letting-itself-come-towards-itself—*Translator's note*.



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that the Transcendent and the world form a pair. Indeed, within this world-to-world relationship it becomes possible to conceive of a truly concrete existential "dis-tance."<sup>4</sup> Like a single bridge connecting two shores of a river, a bridge of transcendence links the hither shore and the yonder shore. That is encounter in the religious sense; from the standpoint of Shinran as a religious seeker, it was his encounter with the *yoki hito* (the "good man" or "master who carries grace for me"), Hōnen. Amida's Sacred Name was thrown as a bridge from the yonder shore to this shore; in the dual form of *ōsō* (going to the Pure Land) and *gensō* (coming back to the samsaric world for the benefit of all living beings).

In speaking of transcendence or beyondness as a world-to-world matter, I do not wish to inject surreptitiously a premise of one universe as a spatial entity—like Robinson's "out there"—in which the two worlds would relate like mutually relative celestial spheres. I shall explain later, in samsara, the realm of animals and the realm of heavenly beings are seen, from the viewpoint of the human realm, as events of that realm; seen from the realm of animals, men belong to the animal world. Still, between those various realms, every one of which is a totality encompassing all the others, there is an encounter, within which takes place a "from-to" movement working in world-to-world transcendence.

Let us take the example of encountering a friend in the street. Even here we cannot conceive of the encounter by envisaging A and B as two points on a straight line, and the distance between A and B shortening *ad infinitum*. From my vantage point, everything, my friend included, lies within my range of vision, and from his point of view I fall within his vision. The scene in which my friend and I greet one another has many possible scenarios. He may be aware of me long before I am aware of him; or he may come into my range of vision first and see me only after sensing my eye on him; or we may catch sight of one another at the same time. And a meeting is a meeting only insofar as it allows of different attitudes: I can, for example, avoid his gaze or I can welcome it. If my seeing took in images as purely as the eye of a camera, and if the meeting of persons were like two objects bumping into each other in physical space, there could be no question of transcendence or encounter in the religious sense.

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<sup>4</sup> Heidegger's *Ent-fernung*. Heidegger interprets existential distance as an overcoming of separation. The Japanese philosopher Kūki Shūzō followed him in this.

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Therefore, I have come—as I shall explain later on—to regard the meaning of transcendence as a meeting between a world of a lower order and a world of a higher order, whereby one part of that lower world becomes nonetheless the place of the encounter of both worlds.

I can perhaps summarize my way of thinking in this way: transcendence must include the idea of a world over against the world, a Yonder Shore over against This Shore. At the basis of this conception of world transcendence, in connection with which the problem of the finitude of man and his world is considered, lies the idea of a "Paradise in the West." For me (and it can be argued that I myself am hereby demythologizing the meaning of the Pure Land in the West), this means that we must consider fully what is signified by the symbol of such a Pure Land, and by this symbol alone, namely, at the same time transcendence as world-transcendence, the transcendence of the world by finite beings and the corresponding advening movement of a transcendent world and Transcendent Other. This also reflects on the meaning of God or Buddha: as long as man is what he is and lives in the world, every world transcendence must, in some sense, imply the meaning of a "Paradise in the West."

In his *Being and Having*, Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973) writes that the human body must be considered in line with the Christian concept of Divine Incarnation. That way of thinking strikes me as very deep and extremely enlightening. Referring this to our present problem, it could mean that, in the very fact of man's existing as such a corporeal being, as such a "being-in-the-world," lies the necessity for God to be, with respect to man, in some sense *up there*. That God is "above" is for me a bodily revelation. As long as the place of the world-to-world encounter is my body—as long as man walks the earth in an upright position and looks up at the heavens—God must reveal himself as fundamentally "above."<sup>5</sup> He cannot reveal himself in any other way.

Similarly, as long as man lives in the world and relates to it as a being opened to the world through bodily existence, a Transcendent that is truly transcendent to the world must be thought of as "advening" from the future into the present in the form of an advent of a transcendent reality. In other words, world transcendence is something that, while transcending,

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<sup>5</sup> In Japanese, the words for "god" 神 and "above" 上 have the same pronunciation: *kami*.

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“advenes”: becoming present in the present from the future in the form of a coming from the transcendent yonder shore world into the present world. I am convinced that true transcendence is that which emerges into the present as something advening in a real transcendence towards us. For me, therefore, the symbol of the Pure Land in the West is extremely meaningful; it carries a weight of meaning that cannot be shaken or replaced by any other symbol.

### *The New Form of Religious Awareness*

In spite of all this, it remains true that in a world of especially vehement secularization—in the present world which, science at the vanguard, is busily secularizing us all—some policy must be devised in order to reach a new understanding of the meaning of traditional religious symbols.

Among scholars of the Jōdo Shin sect of the last one hundred years, Soga Ryōjin (1875–1971) was undoubtedly possessed of the strongest speculative powers. In April 1961, in a colloquium held on Mount Hiei to commemorate the 700th anniversary of sect founder Shinran Shōnin’s death, Soga declared that “the ‘body’ does not change; only the ‘manifestation’ does.”<sup>6</sup>

I for one have difficulty with this formulation. Let us consider the problem in concrete terms through the example provided by Bishop Robinson himself. Robinson writes that as a priest in the contemporary world, holding an important position in the Church, he finds that he cannot really pray any more. This extremely honest and frank admission strikes us as the authentic voice from the depths of a man’s soul, and arouses our sympathy. It is like a Shin believer being unable to invoke Amida’s Name (*nembutsu*) any longer because of the manner of life in the modern secularized world. The *nembutsu*, however, should be something that “does not choose between moving or standing still, sitting or lying down. It should be amenable to any time, place, or occasion.” This means that its recitation does not require that one brings one’s heart to transparency first in a solitary and quiet place. Over against the idea that a specially consecrated time and place—prerequisites of all traditional

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<sup>6</sup> Soga uses the categories *tai* 体 (body, *quidditas*) and *gi* 義 (manifestation, *modus*)—*Translator’s note.*

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religious rites—are the only locus for the realization of the Holy, the spirit of the nembutsu in both Hōnen and Shinran is precisely such a realization of the Holy in the midst of the secular, within the everyday behavior of “moving or standing still, sitting or lying down.”

Still, reciting the nembutsu in a streetcar, or saying “Namu Amida Butsu” in a coffee shop at the moment when the waitress brings you your coffee, is after all a bit awkward. On the other hand, it does not sound strange at all to see an old lady saying “Namu Amida Bu” while being served green tea in a tea house. Why is it awkward to do exactly the same in a coffee house? Something, somewhere, must be out of joint.

Soga Ryōjin says that the “body,” the nembutsu as substance, does not change; but in this technological age of ours it rather looks as if the “body” itself undergoes change and is being progressively corroded. From the standpoint of the “body,” no contradiction should be felt over saying Namu Amida Butsu in a coffee house. On the contrary, the spirit of the nembutsu demands just such a locale. It is still possible to maintain that this kind of awkwardness is due to the change in “manifestation”. But when the problem presents itself in the acute form of prayer becoming impossible in the midst of secularized life, we cannot help concluding that this change in “manifestation” implies also a change in “body.” To borrow one of Robinson’s expressions, the God of modern man has become “a Grandfather in heaven, a kindly Old Man who could be pushed into one corner while they got on with the business of life.”<sup>7</sup> This certainly indicates a change in God’s “body” in a prayerless world.

That the image of such a “Daddy-God” is a blasphemy was pointed out with great perspicacity by Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855). Writing about the faith of his fiancée, Regine Olsen, he remarked that Regine’s God was like a doting uncle who at Christmas time is good for a few presents. The picture is, then, that of a softhearted man, a kind uncle somewhere in another town whom it is nice to have because from time to time he gives us the things we desire. But God has then ceased to be an immediate reality, a serious matter that has to do with our every daily act (our “moving and standing still, sitting and lying down”). No longer is he someone who in my prayer enters into earnest dialogue and negotiation with me. He has become a remote being that comes like a breeze for only

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<sup>7</sup> John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (London, 1963), p. 41.

an occasional visit. But what man has to establish, and establish in the midst of this secular age, is not such a spineless relation with a grandfather God, but a true relationship with a true God. How can and must man as a man truly pray to God? That is the object of Robinson's quest.

Robinson was led to questioning of this kind mainly by the influence of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945). As he was killed in a Nazi prison at the age of thirty-nine, it is often said that Bonhoeffer's thinking did not have sufficient time to mature, that his assertions are full of contradictions, and a good deal of what he says even incomprehensible. Robinson believes, however, that his thought represents a profound testimony of our age, and that we will need many more years to really understand its message. He voices a particular approval of Bonhoeffer's idea of a "beyond within," a "beyond in the midst of our life." In Pure Land doctrine this corresponds to *heizei-gōjō*, the accomplishing or attaining of faith in daily life.<sup>8</sup> In both the Transcendent is found in the midst of present reality, and what is not found among the things of actual reality is not the true Transcendent. It is also Bonhoeffer's contention that for man to live with Jesus Christ as such a Transcendent is the truth of Christianity. It naturally follows that he does not admit of any relationship with the Transcendent apart from that just described. That is why Bonhoeffer attempts to go beyond all traditional interpretations (those of his master Karl Barth included) which accept as a premise Christianity as a Church-centered religion.

Karl Barth, too, asserts that Christianity is not a religion. But for him the term "religion" means the belief that man can attain and grasp God or the Holy self-centeredly and by his own power, and consists in the attempt to do exactly that. This, as he sees it, pertains to all religions except Christianity. For him, the task of theology is to elucidate, in the name of the Church and according to the needs of every age, the truth of the Gospel entrusted to the Church. Consequently, Church-centeredness becomes the first premise for the whole of theology, the totality of its content. Bonhoeffer, on the other hand, maintains that Christianity was not a religion in the beginning, when it appeared in the ancient world

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<sup>8</sup> This is the idea that the authenticity of the believer's faith is not first attested to at the hour of death, by entering the Pure Land with feelings of gratitude and an untroubled heart, but that true faith must realize and prove itself every day, in the midst of daily life.

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in its primitive form. From the standpoint of the Hellenistic world and the concept of religion current in the Greco-Roman mind, the original doctrines of Christianity were viewed as extremely secular, profane, even shameless.

What thus appeared to non-Christians as a "scandal" beyond the common-sense bounds of religion—from whatever viewpoint: the ritual, the moral, or the philosophical—was accepted by the Christians in all simplicity as their God. On the other hand, in the present secularized world, Christianity, no matter how hard it tries, cannot sustain the Church. What, then, is to be done? It is Bonhoeffer's conviction that we have to conceive means to communicate the new contents of Christian faith in a secular language, a totally new form with new words—a language that might sound almost immoral to the pious ears of those contemporaries wedded closely to the traditional ways of thinking.

Robinson makes that conviction his own, and his thought is further influenced by Tillich's theology and Bultmann's theory of demythologization. It could be said that his combining of these three, especially around Bultmann's idea of the proclamation of the Gospel (*kerygma*), represents a personal reflection on his own religious faith. The ideas of Bultmann which influence Robinson so much gave rise, especially in Germany and America, to a new theological trend which has come to be called the post-Bultmann school, which Ebeling and Fuchs represent very actively. Ebeling, especially, gives a theological presentation of the essence of Protestant Christianity by means of a new hermeneutics that are a further development of Bultmann's methods. While Ebeling was deeply influenced by his master Bultmann, we see from the outstanding treatise on Bonhoeffer in his book *Wort und Glaube* (Word and Faith, 1960) that he was also influenced by Bonhoeffer. In his other works, *Das Wesen des Christlichen Glaubens* (The Essence of the Christian Faith, 1959), for example, Ebeling sets forth his own standpoint with the utmost clarity and leads us to think that there is a marked difference between his way of thinking and that of Bultmann. But I cannot go into these matters here.

Comparing Bultmann and his disciples, it appears after all that the master stands head and shoulders above them all, and everything indicates that in the foreseeable future the problems he raised and the theses he defended will continue to influence the theological world.

For Bultmann, *kerygma* is the central idea. When he considers the

problems of history in general, he always focuses on the world as the scene of the salvific event and, especially, on the historical *Existenz* in the world. Even in his most universal speculations, he never strays an inch from the existential standpoint. For him, the historical world by itself is forever relative and the meanings which we can grasp there irretrievably fragmentary and relative, so that nothing absolute can appear anywhere in it. Consequently, the history that we are aware of (and investigate in the science of history) cannot obtain any ultimate meaning as a whole. If a total meaning can be found in history, it is, in his opinion, only through the history of the individual as a person and the self-understanding involved therein. Put more concretely, history seems to obtain its structure or plot through the person of Jesus Christ. But for the present, it is enough to emphasize that a person is invariably required as a core, and that around that core history crystallizes and comes to possess a total structure as history. Only through the mediation of a historical existence does a total meaning and direction become apparent in history.

And this kind of historical existence, and likewise the world as the "seat" of this existence, realizes itself only on the basis of an encounter with the *kerygma*. For through the mediation of the decision of the religious existence, this encounter brings the subject to its fulfilment as historical existence, brings the world therein to unity, and, finally, brings out the ultimate significance of history.

### *History and Nature*

In 1961, during my stay at Marburg, I had the good fortune of meeting with Bultmann frequently. He was then seventy-seven years old, but he was still gifted with very lively speculative powers. On one of these occasions, Bultmann took down from his bookshelves a commentary on the Zen "Oxherding Pictures,"<sup>9</sup> in a German translation by Tsujimura Kōichi,

<sup>9</sup> This booklet tells the story—in ten pictures, to which explanatory poems by master Kuo-an and others are added—of an oxherd looking for a stray cow, up to the moment that he brings it back home. It shows, in the form of a parable, the process of the quest for the true mind of the self. Towards the end, the cow has become completely docile, so that the oxherd returns home sitting on the back of the cow and playing a flute, without even bothering anymore about the tether. From that point on, all concern for the cow is forgotten. The German translation alluded to is *Der Ochs und sein Hirte*, translated by Kōichi Tsujimura and Hartmut Buchner (Pfullingen, 1958).

a professor of philosophy at Kyoto University, and said:

"This is an admirable book. What is explained here is the same as is taught in Christianity. In my understanding, the ox stands for the human heart. Chasing this ox must mean the quest for the true self. Pursuing the true self means forgetting the self; the self becomes the true self only when it is forgotten. In the Oxherding Pictures, this is presented in an extraordinarily clever way, but the content does not differ practically from Christian truth. The only difference is that history does not appear in it. I do not find the idea, so strong in Christianity, that truth is realized in history."

I replied with a remark that certainly betrays the influence of Nishitani Keiji on my thinking: "Indeed, history may not be present in this work, but is it not equally true that, in Christian, especially Protestant, doctrine, Nature is absent?"

Bultmann then asked me what I understood by "Nature." I answered that I meant existential Nature, the Nature that must be present when existence becomes true existence and not nature that comes under the spatialized categories of abstract time and space—what existential philosophers would call "the vulgar world concept." I then asked again if it was not true that this existential Nature did not appear clearly enough in Christian doctrine. After a moment's reflection, Bultmann answered in the affirmative. He then inquired how I interpreted existential Nature. At that moment, I recalled his interpretation of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. According to Saint Paul, resurrection is meaningless if it is not bodily resurrection; he goes so far as to say that if Christ did not rise up (in the flesh), his own faith would be in vain. While treating Paul's theology in his *Theology of the New Testament, I*,<sup>10</sup> Bultmann explains these passages by making a distinction between the Greek word *sarx*, meaning the "flesh," or body of sin, and *soma*, meaning the body of resurrection. In the English translation, this distinction is rendered by two words, "flesh" and "body." The "resurrection in the flesh" (in ordinary parlance) then means resurrection in the *soma* and not in the *sarx*. *Soma*, according to Bultmann, is the locus where the real truth manifests itself. With these recollections in mind, I replied: "If you want an example of the existential meaning of Nature, would not the way you conceive of the corporality

<sup>10</sup> Translated by Kedrick Grobel (London, 1952). The original work, *Theologie des neuen Testaments*, was published in 1948.



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of the risen Christ, the *soma* as the place of the resurrection, be a good example of that existential Nature?" This time, Bultmann was lost in thought for quite a time, and then, referring to Heidegger's conception of the *Geviert* (the quadrate or fourfold),<sup>11</sup> inquired whether my conception of Nature resembled this "*Geviert*"—which Heidegger had started using at just about that time as a symbol of the world.

Since I had been strongly influenced by these Heideggerian ideas, I had to say that my thought on the subject came near to that of Heidegger. Bultmann declared that he was against that way of thinking. He explained his objection by saying that although this *Geviert* is a world wherein truth is disclosed, there is no place in it for a true encounter with a Thou. At the moment it struck me that this critique of Heidegger was altogether typical of Bultmann. His remarks have stayed with me to this day. Not to be satisfied with the idea of the Fourfold or "world-openness" through which the later Heidegger deepened his awareness of the world, but to struggle earnestly for a congenial conception of the necessity of the encounter with a Thou, and proceed from this encounter to conceive of history in its full sense—this, in my opinion, is an inevitable outcome, given Bultmann's standpoint.

If I may be allowed a personal word of interpretation on Bultmann's view, I would say that his "decision in faith," with the world as its mediation and the place of its conversion, wants to exchange the traditional idea of a historical transmission of the revelation (God's Word) in the past for that of a here-and-now encounter with the Gospel *kerygma* that advenes from the future. With the world as its mediation, history can thus spread into world history from the individual history of the *Existenz*, and the being-in-the-world of the existence can become the religious existence that makes its decision in the historical world. Consequently, the full meaning of history can strictly speaking only be conceived of through the meaning of religious existence as a being in the historical world. And it is the "*welten*" (with its implication of rotation) of this world that constitutes the encounter for our religious existence, by giving the existence of Jesus Christ in the past a cyclic turn and making us meet the Christ event as

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<sup>11</sup> I alluded to this earlier. In brief, it is the idea that sky and earth, gods and mortals are bound together into oneness, and all four mirror each other. This is then symbolized by the quadrate, the square, or the fourfold.

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something advening into the present from the future. In other words, through the mediation of the world, the past-to-present direction is switched to a future-to-present one, and therein the encounter with the Word of God may come about.

In the case of the Buddha's Name as well, the two movements come into being together. I encounter, here and now, Amida's Name advening as eternity from the Pure Land. This occurs in the form of an I-Thou encounter in the actual present, with the Name (as the Thou) advening from the future. And on the other hand, at the moment of this encounter, by the religious act of "Namu Amida Butsu" as a decision which brings evocation and response into unison, the symbolic world (in which all Buddhas are praising the Name of Amida Buddha and guaranteeing the truth of that Name and birth in the Pure Land through its invocation) is discovered directly underfoot.

In even more concrete form, this symbolic world, the background for man's encounter with the Name, also signifies the opening up of the world in which the nembutsu is historically transmitted. This means, in turn, just as in Heidegger's *Geviert*, the realization of the world of all Buddhas praising and guaranteeing Amida's Name—a world wherein everything mirrors everything else. And precisely in this world, just as in Bultmann's historical world, the encounter with the Thou, the meeting with the Name, obtains. In that sense, we find here, in a concrete form, a synthesis of the standpoints of these two thinkers.

In the second chapter of the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, entitled "True Living," Shinran Shōnin calls the Seventeenth Vow (or Prayer) "the Vow of the praise of all Buddhas, the Vow of the utterance in praise of the Name by all Buddhas." This means that all Buddhas praise Amida Buddha and exalt his Name; that is, by pronouncing his Name, all Buddhas praise Amida. Understandably, this is generally interpreted as referring not to our recitation of Amida's Name, but to an event belonging to the absolute world in which "Namu Amida Butsu" occurs on the side of the Dharma (*hottai Myōgō*)—something taking place among the Buddhas in their Buddha-worlds transcendent to the world of man. In other words, it is a matter of all Buddhas praising one another and exalting the Name of Amida.

If that were the whole truth, however, it would be difficult to see how this praise by the Buddhas relates to our own religious practice of the

nembutsu. Right at the beginning of the same "True Living" chapter, Shinran says clearly: "The Great Living is to pronounce the Name of the Tathāgata of Unimpeded Light." I would like to interpret this term "Great Living" as religious or symbolic activity, in which the practice whereby all Buddhas praise Amida's Name is mirrored in the practice whereby we, on our side, "pronounce the Name of the Tathāgata of Unimpeded Light." Here, we are aware that our recital of the Name is praise and exaltation of the Name. And our recital of the Name is, in turn, mirrored in the praise of all the Buddhas. This makes it clear that the "Vow of the praise of all Buddhas" is the "Prayer in which All Buddhas pronounce the Name."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The exact wording at the beginning of chapter two of the *Kyōgyōshinshō* is: "As I reverently reflect on the outgoing *ekō*, I find therein the great living and the great faith." [The adjective great has been added to living (practice) and faith with the intent of exalting them. *Ekō*, or merit-transference, has two directions: the "outgoing phase" (*ōsō*) is the direction from us to the Buddha; the "coming phase" (*gensō*) is the direction from the Buddha to all living beings (insofar as it is thought of relatively, over against *ōsō*). Merit-transference is the working of Amida Buddha's Compassion in the form of the Name; the working of an absolute love, whereby the Buddha's substantiality and totality are, as such, handed down to our side. In this working there is an "outgoing phase" and a "coming phase." Living (practice) and faith are both discussed from the viewpoint of the "outgoing phase."]

The *Kyōgyōshinshō* text reads further: "The great living is to pronounce the Name of the Nyorai of Unimpeded Light. In this living are embraced all good things and all the roots of merit. They are instantly perfected (as soon as the Name is pronounced). [In other words, the ultimate desire of man is promptly fulfilled therein.] The Name is the treasure-ocean of the merits accruing from the absolute reality of Suchness. [The Name is the absolute truth as Suchness; it is the ocean of merit wherein this truth is realized as it is, in a unique and unduplicatable way.] Therefore, it is called the great living.

"So it is that this great living issues out of the Prayer (or Vow) of Absolute Compassion, for which reason the Prayer is known as that which is praised by all Buddhas, or that in which all Buddhas pronounce the Name, or as that which is heartily applauded by all Buddhas."

[The "True Living" chapter, indeed, explains the text of the Seventeenth Vow (or Prayer) further as a Prayer that the Name shall be uttered in praise by all Buddhas.]

"In *The Larger Sutra of Eternal Life* (vol. I), we find:  
 'If, upon my attaining Buddhahood, all the innumerable Buddhas in the ten quarters were not approvingly to pronounce my Name, may I not attain the Supreme Enlightenment.'"  
 (D. T. Suzuki trans.)

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In other words, the Pure Land and this world, all Buddhas and all living beings, the cosmic chorus sounding the Name throughout the Ten Quarters and the career of the historical nembutsu on earth, form, in this symbolic action, a locus of *Geviert*. At this point occurs the encounter of Amida and me. Symbolic action of this sort can be called, with Jaspers, absolute action, wherein all opposition of subject and object melts away and concrete reality appears in its purity on the standpoint of action. It is precisely there that the encounter and mutual evocation of I and Thou are realized.

This standpoint of action must certainly be explored further in connection with Nishida Kitarō's view of Action-Intuition and Tanabe Hajime's elucidation of action from the viewpoint of Practice-Faith, but it seems to me equally relevant to the difference in viewpoint just mentioned between Heidegger and Bultmann. In any case, in my opinion, the "Namu Amida Butsu" which comes forth at the point where the opposition of subject and object is overcome, in the "Great Living" characteristic of religious action, shows an extraordinary depth. And its significance for the present day may become much clearer when explored in the light of the contemporary problematics of philosophy of religion and theology.

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