

# The Concept of Grace in Paul, Shinran, and Luther

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DESPITE the manifest differences between Paul, Shinran, and Luther, and their differences from us today, these three religious thinkers have something in common which, over and beyond time, unites them not only with each other but also with us.<sup>1</sup>

First, they are all at home in religious world-views, which are, to be sure, very different, but which intend to show men the way to salvation from the meaninglessness of existence. That is, generally speaking, the essential intent of religious world-views. Paul's spiritual home is Judaism or Jewish Christianity; Shinran's is Buddhism in the form of the teaching of the Pure Land of

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<sup>1</sup> A German version of this article has been published in *Theologische Zeitschrift*, Jahrgang 31, 1975. The opportunity to do this study was provided through the publication of two important works: D. T. Suzuki's English translation of Shinran's chief work, *The Kyōgyō-shimbō*, and his *Collected Writings on Shin Buddhism* which were published by the Eastern Buddhist Society in Kyoto in 1973 on the occasion of the celebration of Shinran's 800th birthday. I used parts of the subject matter of my present treatise for lectures given in the winter semester of 1974-75. The present treatise, which is a summary of those lectures, was presented in August, 1975, at the International Congress for the History of Religions in Lancaster, England. As far as I know, this material has not been dealt with before in any other publications. In their comparative studies, G. Mensching and H. Butschkus referred only to Shinran and Luther, and their approach is different from mine. Albert Schweitzer, whose interpretation of Paul I have generally followed, does not make such comparisons at all even in his unpublished manuscripts on the history of religions. Catholic and Protestant theologians, as far as they are concerned with Buddhism, are generally interested in Zen, although, regardless of philosophy, they should have very good reason for confronting Shinran.

Amida; Luther's is the Christianity of the Catholic Church. Furthermore, through personal experience all three became convinced of the insufficiency of their respective religious traditions, and in creatively establishing their own lines of thought within these traditions, all became reformers who produced new forms of their respective religions. Characteristic of their transformations of religious tradition, granted that this activity is found in each in a different way, is that for each salvation is understood as being unattainable through striving but won only through trust in a divine power. In none of their cases does this mean that man works together with the divine power to attain salvation; it means that his salvation is to be wholly understood as the grace of the divine giver.

This trust in the grace of God in Christ or in the promise of the All-embracing Mercy of Amida Buddha moves all three reformers to a new interpretation of the holy tradition to which each wants to remain true, and it brings all three into conflict with traditional belief; but, at the same time, it produces certain difficulties in their own thought. From their emphasis on grace as opposed to works, problems arise, especially for ethics, and each of them has to defend his doctrine of grace against possible misunderstandings in that sphere. We could in fact say that the schemes of the respective world-views and anthropologies through which their doctrines of salvation are expressed actually block the unfolding of their true intention, and instead of solving problems, actually create new ones.

This similarity among these three religious thinkers makes their comparison not only interesting for the history of religions but also significant for the philosophy of religion or theology. The question about the meaning of existence and the question about the possibility of an answer are no less important for us than they were for Paul, Shinran, and Luther, even if we do not share, or no longer share, their presuppositions. Those who pursue the question about existence on the basis of the Bible, as Luther did, or as Shin Buddhists did in emulation of Shinran and his interpretation of the sutras which he regarded as authoritative, cannot overlook the changes with regard to the age and mental environment which separate us from them. Even if the historically and secularly oriented person of today is very attuned to these differences, his awareness of the dissolution of the old world-views in which the question about existence earlier found its answer by no means resolves the

## THE CONCEPT OF GRACE

question itself. In fact, for those of us who live in a graceless age, the question about grace moves us rather more than it did those who seemingly had grace constantly at hand. That holds true even when we say that the concept of grace has become rather foreign to us today. That briefly is why I wish to discuss here the concept of grace in these three figures.

The starting points for our inquiry are the religious traditions in which Paul, Shinran, and Luther were situated, as well as the experiences they had within their traditions by which they became reformers.

### I

Paul, Shinran, and Luther appeared out of definite spiritual contexts. Paul's was late Jewish-early Christian apocalypticism which had already been transformed in part into Hellenistic mystery religion. Shinran's was Buddhism in the form of Amida belief. Luther's was the institution of salvation as represented by the Catholic Church at the end of the Middle Ages. Each context had its own long history and in each of these histories the original driving impulse was certainly no other than the attempt to realize the meaning of human existence in a world beset by meaninglessness. It is true that within this commonality of original, universal religious striving, the question of meaning is put and answers are sought in fundamentally different ways in Far Eastern Buddhism and in Judaism. In Buddhism all existence is seen as trapped in a cycle without beginning or end. Salvation means escape from this cycle. In Judaism all being and all events have a beginning as the creation of a God who stands outside the world, a God who leads history toward a goal which consists in a new and perfect creation in which only the elect shall live. In Buddhism the difficulty lies in man's lack of knowledge about the true state of things and, resulting from this, his captivity within the world. In Judaism man's difficulty stems from his disobedience of God's command and the resulting entanglement in sin and guilt. In Buddhism salvation consists in knowledge and in following the way of that knowledge. In Judaism it consists in the reconciliation of the sinner with God. The Buddhist arrives in Nirvana, while in Biblical belief man arrives in the Kingdom of God.

In the course of their histories the aforementioned basic concepts of Judaism and Buddhism took on very different forms. So, for instance, in the late Jewish

apocalypticism which forms Paul's world of thought, it is out of the transformation of an originally somewhat earthly rule of God that a new aeon comes into being. With the coming of this aeon the Messiah puts an end to the existing world, and if the yet living and the dead successfully withstand the trial of the end-time, there will be transformation or resurrection into a non-earthly way of being. With the early Christians, who saw in Jesus the promised Messiah who through his death on the cross atoned for the sins of all believers, Paul expects the resurrected Jesus to return soon in all his glory to establish the Kingdom of God.

As a consequence of the fact that the Kingdom did not come, the church arose among those who, in believing in Christ's return, had expected the end of the world. The church continued to hope for the return of its Lord and the completion of his work of salvation, but it removed this final event into the indefinite future. It did this in the same way that it understood itself to be the institution of salvation as established in the world by God through Jesus. In time not only did the pope take over the representation of Christ on earth, but in endowing the altar sacraments with the power of imparting salvation the church found a surrogate even for the non-arrival of the new aeon. The effect of this was that instead of the arrival of the Kingdom of God on earth, the soul rose to heaven. This was made possible through good works, which in turn were made possible through the sacraments.

The changes which occurred in the belief of the Christian church from the time of its unanticipated origins into the time of Luther are no greater than those which were experienced in Buddhism from the time of its establishment by Shakyamuni to the time of Shinran. In the historical development of Buddhism, there were two essential moments. The first was the formation of the Bodhisattva ideal in the Mahayana. In this concept, the Mahayanist no longer endeavours simply to free himself from the samsaric cycle of endless births through self-effort, as in Hinayana Buddhism, but may count on the help of merciful spirits, above all, the help of Buddha himself. The second was the transformation of the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, into Amida Buddha. Amida Buddha made the vow that he would not enter Nirvana until he had saved all living beings. Here it became necessary and sufficient for salvation to put one's complete trust in this promise of Amida, and this trust was given attestation through the continuous repetition of the formula, *Namu-amida-butsu*.

## THE CONCEPT OF GRACE

That, briefly, is the Amidist belief in the attainment of the "Pure Land in the West"—in contrast to the "way of holiness"—as it was taught to Shinran by his teacher Hōnen. It forms the basis for Shinran's development of the idea of a Buddhism of faith or trust, just as Jewish Christianity provides the ground on which Paul developed his specific idea of salvation through Christ which later as the sacrament and work piety of the Catholic Church originating in Paul, became the object of Luther's reformation. In Paul and Luther as in Shinran the relation to tradition is characterized by a radicalization of a pre-existent moment of grace, a radicalization in which the respective tradition is given the pronounced character of a religion of grace. In spite of their very real and decisive transformations of previously valid concepts of faith, none of them wished to be an innovator, but rather hoped to reaffirm through radical reevaluation, as they saw it, some lost or misunderstood meaning original to their tradition.

The followers of Paul, Shinran, and Luther, however, were not content with merely honoring their teachers as reformers, but made them, at least Paul and Shinran, saints. As such, they were imagined to have been brought to their reformative activity through supernatural occurrences, which is in general accordance with a pattern commonly encountered in the legends of saints.

Such legendary motifs in the lives of saints, of visitations by good and divine powers or of struggles with evil demonic forces, appear in the lives of all three, if in different forms. In the Catholic Church Paul is revered as one of the highest of saints. His conversion on the Damascus road in the Book of Acts is attributed to an appearance of Christ, and his life is, generally speaking, depicted throughout as surrounded by miraculous events (Acts 9:1-31; 22:3-21; 26:9-20). In his own letters he asserts that his authority lies in divine revelation (Galatians 1:19-24; 2:2) and he speaks of himself as being plagued by demonic powers (II Corinthians 12:1-10).

In the life story of Shinran (*Godenshō*), especially significant is the vision of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara who appeared to him in Rokkakudō Temple in the form of a beautiful woman and promised assistance in all his struggles.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> "The Life of Shinran Shonin," trans. D. T. Suzuki and Sasaki Gesshō, in *Collected Writings on Shin Buddhism* (hereafter referred to as *Collected Writings*) (Kyoto: Eastern Buddhist Society, 1973), p. 170 f.

This account, recorded by his great-grandson along with similar supernatural experiences and events,<sup>3</sup> and which may possibly derive ultimately from Shinran himself, is given credence by followers in the Shin sect, some of whom revere him as an incarnation of Amida.<sup>4</sup>

Luther confesses that he entered the monastery because, in the midst of a terrible thunderstorm, he made the vow, "Help, holy Anna—I will become a monk!" The reaction of Luther's father is equally interesting for he scorned his son, saying that what Luther had thought to have been a heavenly event was actually a deception of the devil.<sup>5</sup> It is well known that Luther, not only in the monastery but also in later life, often had dealings with the devil.<sup>6</sup>

The good and evil spirits with which Paul, Shinran, and Luther had to do in their lives belong to the idea of the end-time or latter-day, a period in which all three thought they lived. Such experiences and ideas can of course be explained historically and psychologically with reference to this belief in the end-time. The significance of such ideas, however, consists doubtlessly in the fact that the consciousness of a divine mission is being reflected in them, a consciousness which arose out of their insight and which was likewise perceived by those who let themselves be moved by such preaching or teaching. We might say that such visions are eruptions of truth out of a prior concealment into symbolic form while legends are an articulation of the experience of having been moved by the power of such revelations.

Such things happened to Paul, Shinran, and Luther as they thought and lived through the question about the meaning of existence, a process which while occurring within their respective holy traditions at the same time reached beyond those bounds. Today, as we attempt to trace their thinking on this question, we are able to understand something of what they have to say about merciful grace and come to see it as a possibility for salvation, a possibility that resulted from their thorough and serious contemplation of their situation.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165 f.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>5</sup> Otto Scheel, *Dokumente zu Luthers Entwicklung*, 1929.

<sup>6</sup> H. Obendiek, *Der Teufel bei Martin Luther*, 1931.

## THE CONCEPT OF GRACE

### II

Paul knew the grace of God through earliest Christianity's idea of the sacrificial death and resurrection of Christ. By virtue of that sacrifice, God withdraws the penalty for the former sins of believers in order that they may take part in the glory of the Lord upon his return (I Corinthians 15:3f. cf. Acts 2:14f.). But for earliest Christianity the command of the holy law was still valid. Anyone breaking these laws became guilty all over again and would not be able to successfully withstand final judgment.

Paul, the first theological thinker of early Christianity,<sup>7</sup> explains that if Christ was resurrected, the arrival of a new aeon can no longer belong simply to the future; in the victory of Christ over death the passing to a new aeon has begun. The world of the resurrection with its spiritual power realizes itself even in the midst of the temporal continuum of this world through the baptism of believers, who die in Christ and arise with him in a new existence. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (II Corinthians 5:17).

Death has no dominion over the resurrected body. Sufferings which have yet to be endured only bind those who share in Christ's body more closely to their crucified and ascended Lord (Romans 14:7-8). The requirements of the law can no longer frighten the believer, for they belong to the old aeon that was overcome through Christ. Their place has been taken by the Spirit of God which works in the believer and enables him to ready himself inwardly for the joyful fulfillment of God's will (Romans 8:1f.). Therefore, the justice of the believer is wholly a gift of grace and yet at the same time his own work, but it is without any merit for himself independent of God. It rests entirely on the grace which works in him.

The apostle Paul emphasizes that his understanding of grace must appear to the world as foolishness because the world either is not acquainted with or will not allow the presuppositions of his understanding (I Corinthians 1:18f.). He knows, too, that for the Jew as well as the Christian who holds to Jewish law, his understanding of grace must seem a blasphemy against God. They do not attribute to the cross and resurrection the significance these had for

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<sup>7</sup> Albert Schweitzer, *Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus*, 1930, pp. 4, and 365 f.

him resulting as a consequence of his thought and in accordance with his experience.

When we turn to Shinran, we find a very similar doctrine of grace, even to the extent of a parallel structure, although the circumstances in which Shinran's doctrine was formed were extrinsically completely different and with partly differing presuppositions. As Paul's idea of the divine event of grace resulted as a consequence of his thought on the figure of Christ as given in tradition, so too are Shinran's radical conclusions drawn from a given doctrine of grace, conclusions whereby he became the founder of a particular form of Amida Buddhism. Paul's relation to Judaism or to Jewish Christianity corresponds to Shinran's relation to the Amida Buddhism brought from China to Japan. Just as Paul radicalized the salvific significance of death and resurrection, Shinran radicalized the trust in the promise of the All-embracing Mercy of Amida.

The differences we find in the beliefs of Jewish Christianity and Amida Buddhism as they later developed are basically differences of their respective savior types. At the center of Christian belief stands a historical personality. Amida, on the other hand, is a mythological figure, or as Suzuki Daisetz in his commentary on the *Kyōgyōshinshō* says, a metaphysical reality, a product of the religious consciousness.<sup>8</sup> Insofar as the Messianic title "Christ" and the Bodhisattva-being of Amida are indicative of their functions as saviors, one may speak of a correspondence between the two savior types. They do have great differences, however, and this is seen, for example, in the respective ideas regarding incarnation, which will be but mentioned here.<sup>9</sup>

According to the earliest Christian-Pauline notion, Jesus, as the Christ or the one destined to be the future Messiah, dies and is resurrected in order to atone for the sins of believers and to bring about the cosmic turning to the new aeon. Faith is directed toward this historical-suprahistorical event in the end-time. For the Amida believer, salvation is based on the promise Amida Buddha made not to enter Nirvana until all beings are freed from their ignorance in samsaric existence and enabled to replace their evil karma with good

<sup>8</sup> *The Kyōgyōshinshō*, trans. D. T. Suzuki (Kyoto: Eastern Buddhist Society, 1973), p. 204.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 252.



## THE CONCEPT OF GRACE

karma, which makes entry into the Pure Land possible. In spite of the once and for all character of Amida's promise, it does not have or is not given the significance of a sacred event in time or at the end of time, as is the case in the New Testament with regard to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. The nature of grace with regard to Amida's vow lies not so much in a once and for all temporal happening as it does in the timeless, eternally valid truth of its content. The grace of Amida is spoken of not in a category of facticity but in the category of Dharma, which means "teaching," but also refers to being or reality.<sup>10</sup> One can therefore say that in Christianity the teaching is grounded on a historical fact, while in Buddhism it is the teaching of the sacred fact which matters.<sup>11</sup>

Another fundamental difference in the respective ideas of sacred history is seen in the fact that in Biblical-Christian eschatology history comes to an end with the arrival of the Kingdom of God, while in Buddhism each ended kalpa is followed by another in an endless repetition. However, despite the basic difference between Paul and Shinran, the decisive changes which they introduced into their traditions have in their structures much in common.

Paul argues that since Christ has arisen, the new aeon has already broken forth into reality. He derives from this event all his statements concerning the essence of grace and its effects upon the relation of man to God and of man to man. Similarly, for Shinran all is decided through complete trust in the authenticity of Amida's vow or promise. The content of this promise is for him the basis of his belief just as the message of the resurrection is the basis of belief for Paul. For Shinran, too, there are certain inner and outer experiences in which the working and therefore the reality of Amida's mercy is evident. Certainly for Shinran these experiences are not unimportant, but they are in fact no more a determining factor for him than they are for Paul. Even if a person never experiences Amida's mercy, even if one is sceptical of it, it still remains true.<sup>12</sup> Karuna is absurd only as far as a reasoning faculty which demands proof is concerned. By virtue of this essentially undemonstrable nature

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260 f.

<sup>11</sup> *Collected Writings*, p. 201.

<sup>12</sup> *Tanmishō*, VIII, included in *Collected Writings*; cf. *Tanmi Shō* (Kyoto: Ryukoku University, 1962).

of grace, Shinran can comfort the despairing with the idea—often encountered in Amida belief—that as a consequence of Amida's All-embracing Mercy not only will the good be saved but also the evil. He can state that in the paradoxical formulation, "if even the good can become blessed, how much more so the evil."<sup>13</sup> Good works are not necessary for blessedness, not even in the form of cultic practices, such as the recitation of the Nembutsu, for example. The recitation of the Nembutsu can, at best, serve for training in faith. Fully-arrived faith, however, consists in the pure inwardness of enlightenment in which the believer is already in Nirvana, and which, therefore, cannot be rationally grasped. At best, it can be brought to expression in paradox.<sup>14</sup>

When the Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier, on his visit to Japan in 1549, encountered what seem to have been followers of Shinran, he thought to his shocked surprise that the country had been penetrated by Lutheran heresy, which is understandable in view of Shinran's emphasis of grace alone being the path to blessedness. In fact, Shinran's radicalization of Amida belief is very similar to Luther's reform of Catholicism. Shinran's Jōdo Shin sect is related to his teacher's Jōdo sect in much the same way as Luther's thought is to the Roman Catholicism of his time. Shinran's radicalization of Amida Buddhism precisely corresponds to Luther's assertion of *sola gratia, sola fide* (through grace alone, through faith alone) against Catholic synergism.

Luther argues, just as Shinran does, if grace, then grace alone. As a pope was later to remark of the Jesuits, "*sint ut sunt, aut non sint*" (be just as they are, otherwise not be at all) so Shinran against his tradition and Luther with reference to Paul against the Catholic Church would say: trust in grace alone or there is neither grace nor trust. Similarly, one can compare Shinran's criticism of Zen Buddhism with Luther's criticism of the mystics of the late Middle Ages and the spiritualists of the Age of Reformation.<sup>15</sup> Luther's delimitation of the boundary between himself and the spiritualists has its parallel

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, III.

<sup>14</sup> These ideas are found in their most concentrated but also simplest form in the *Tannishō*, which is something like a catechism of the Shin sect.

<sup>15</sup> In this regard, see, for example, the Marburg dissertation of Ueda Shizuteru, *Die Gottesgeburt in der Seele und der Durchbruch zur Gottheit. Die mystische Anthropologie Meister Eckharts und ihre Konfrontation mit der Mystik des Zen-Buddhismus*, 1965.

## THE CONCEPT OF GRACE

in Shinran's criticism of the way of salvation through self-effort typified by Zen. Just as Paul stands between Judaism and the early Jewish-Christian community with his idea of grace, so Shinran stands between Jodo and Zen with his idea of grace, and Luther between Catholicism and mystical spiritualism with his evangelism. All three reformers had to face similar opposition on two fronts.

The spiritual landscape in which each of these men developed his position and within which he carried forth his criticism and belief, is in each case very different. Nevertheless, their common concern for salvation through grace alone and their common struggle against every form of self-salvation—as Buddhists say, the opposition of *tariki* and *jiriki*—binds these men together over and beyond all limitations of time and space. It is again understandable how Karl Barth in his *Church Dogmatics*, with no less astonishment than Francis Xavier, speaks of the remarkable relationship between Shinran's teaching and Luther's doctrine of justification. He reproaches Shinran only for using the wrong name to designate the center of his teaching: instead of Amida, Barth says, he should say Christ.<sup>16</sup>

Barth's comment suggests a possible Christianization of Shinran, but we wish no more to engage in that than we do in an Amidaization of Pauline or Lutheran theology. The reason for our refusing to do so is not due to "the power of the name" of the savior, Christ or Amida; a power which does not allow any other name to be surrogated for it, and which Barth, no less than Shinran, believes in. One main reason for refusing a Christianization of Amida or an Amidaization of Paul and Luther is that exactly in their similar concepts of grace, what we might call "grace-monism," a problem common to Paul, Shinran, and Luther emerges which is of central importance and which cannot be overlooked. This problem has two aspects. The first regards their reference to holy tradition. The second regards ethical difficulties which arise from their doctrine of grace.

### III

We turn first to their reference to holy tradition. Each of them makes

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<sup>16</sup> Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* I/2, p. 372 f.

appeal to scriptures of a holy tradition for their belief. It is not their intention merely to proclaim their own experiences and insights, or to speak of the revelations and enlightenments which they have had. They are conscious, to be sure, of the singular character of immediate inspiration and of the limits of its communicability. They encounter such limits for example in interpretations of texts by others which differ from their own understandings, and in misunderstandings of their statements by friend and opponent alike. They, however, both wish to and are convinced that they teach nothing but what is contained in the holy writings. For this reason the proofs of scripture which they collect and interpret from the Bible or from the sutras are very important for them. Paul is a Jewish scribe. Luther translates the Bible and wishes to be nothing other than a Biblical theologian. Shinran's chief work, the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, consists mainly of a collection of texts from sutras and excerpts from commentaries on the sutras. Paul quotes Christian hymns in his letters. Luther composes church hymns on the basis of Old Testament Psalms and stories from the Gospels. Shinran incorporates Buddhist faith into his Wasan songs.<sup>17</sup>

Yet certainly the individuality of all three is also clear even as they maintain a relation to tradition. Each evaluates his respective documents differently although all three actually bring only the parts of the documents forward as suits their purposes. They leave extensive parts unmentioned. One can, however, not really reproach Paul for that, since the Biblical canon was not established until after his time by the Christian church. Luther's depreciatory judgments of certain canonical books are well known. His personal experience plays a large part in the formulation of his criterion of the canon as "that which has to do with Christ." This parallels the rejection of knowledge of Christ *kata sarca* (according to the flesh) in favor of Christ *kata pneuma* (according to the spirit) by Paul (II Corinthians 5:16). Similar to this is Shinran's concentration on the 48 promises or vows of Amida contained in one of three primary sutras which he selected out of all those in the Buddhist canon. He

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<sup>17</sup> Examples of the songs (*Wasan*) of Shinran, along with commentaries on them, are found in two articles by D. T. Suzuki: "The Songs of Shinran Shonin" and "Infinite Light" in *Collected Writings*, pp. 111 f. and 129 f. respectively.

## THE CONCEPT OF GRACE

bases his understanding of grace on these 48 promises.<sup>18</sup>

Just at this point, however, one sees the problem of such an approach to tradition. Paul, Shinran, and Luther add to and change the traditional texts both in their wording and in their subject matter. That unjustly conditions the life and continued effectiveness that these texts legitimately have. It is characteristic, furthermore, that all three reformers furnish us with evidence enough to show that their manipulations of the texts they use are directly related to the exposition of their idea of the essence of grace.

Paul, for instance, supports his eschatological idea of the cancellation of the law by reference to the gnostic concept of the law as having been given by evil angelic powers, who through the law enslaved mankind (Galatians 3:19; cf. Acts 7:38 and 53, Hebrews 2:2). That stands in complete contradiction to the Old Testament-Jewish and to the traditional early Christian interpretation, both of Moses's reception of the law on Sinai and of the purpose of the giving of the Mosaic law. It also supplied one basis for Luther's misunderstanding of the Pauline *abrogatio legis* (abrogation of the law).

To prevent a new works righteousness from developing out of Paul's questionable transformation of the law of works into the "law of faith," Luther adds to the wording of his translation of Romans 3:28 the famous and notorious little word "alone." This word can effect a displacement of Paul's meaning, and in fact it did so in suggesting the belief that faith without works makes for blessedness and that good works are, indeed, even harmful for blessedness.

Discussion of the formation and fate of the doctrine of "justification through faith alone without works of the law" in Luther and his followers would lead us too far away from our central theme. It is only to be mentioned that in the *theologia crucis* (theology of the cross) of his early period, in the despairing belief that he had been damned by God because he could not find peace of mind in the monastic life and in the sacraments, Luther found salvation in the *se ipsum resignare ad infernum pro Dei voluntate* (to resign oneself to hell if God so wills). This same thought is also found in Shinran. According to a passage in the *Tannishō*, Shinran is supposed to have said that he, as an un-

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<sup>18</sup> The 48 promises of Amida in the *Sutra of Eternal Life* have been translated with commentary in *Collected Writings*, p. 42 f. Cf. *The Kyōgyōshinshō*, p. 184 f.

learned man, did not care if Hōnen—and consequently also he himself—were in error about Nembutsu and must go to hell because of it. Since he could not, in any case, perform meritorious works, he belonged in hell anyway. But, he continues, if the promise of Amida, which had been handed down from Shakyamuni to Hōnen, is true, then Nembutsu will suffice.<sup>19</sup>

If these stages of comforted despair as found in Luther and Shinran are not identical, they are, in any case, more alike than Luther's experience of grace in his theology of the cross and the final form which his doctrine of justification took in the forensic idea of a *nonimputatio peccati* (nonimputation of sin) and an *imputatio* of the *aliena justitia Christi* (imputation of the foreign justice of Christ) in the believer. But Shinran came to a similar notion in the imputation of foreign merit. He did it, however, by intentionally misreading the Chinese text of the 18th promise of Amida in the *Sutra of Eternal Life*. The usual, literal sense of the reading, found as such even in the Jōdo sect, was completely reversed. In the usual reading of the text, the believers bring their merits to Amida and thereby enter the Pure Land. In the *Kyōgyōshinbō*, Shinran interprets this passage to mean that Amida transfers all the merit he possesses to anyone who, hearing his name, has only a single thought of pure belief. On the basis of Amida's merit the believer is reborn into the Pure Land.<sup>20</sup>

In this way, Shinran tries, as do Paul and Luther, to demonstrate that his grace-monism stands in agreement with holy tradition. All of them believe strongly in authority and therefore it is important for them to make this demonstration. It is trust in the "foreign power" which is the material side of both Christian and Amidist belief in the idea of "through grace alone." That is complemented formally by reference to a foreign authority.

For all three men, it is clearly a matter of personal struggle for salvation as the fulfillment of meaning in their lives. It is just as clear, however, that their recourse to holy tradition to give authority to what they had won through personal struggle, a gain which goes far beyond holy tradition, is a very questionable matter. Their chosen way of salvation through grace alone has even worse consequences for ethical practice. The ethical problem is already

<sup>19</sup> *Tannishō*, II.

<sup>20</sup> *The Kyōgyōshinbō*, pp. 89, and 293. *Collected Writings*, pp. 45, 50, and 72.

## THE CONCEPT OF GRACE

apparent in the fact that they have to refer to a foreign authority for affirmation of truth, the proof of which is quite fragile.

It is a fact of experience that the more a faith supports itself through reliance on an infallible outer, foreign authority, instead of relying simply on its own inner and fallible self-certainty, the more intolerant it will be towards those who go in another way. It does that simply for the sake of validating such authority and legitimatizing its own subjugation to it. In order to safeguard itself from admitting any error, it is forced to regard those others as enemies of the true faith, unbelievers, men sunken in depravity. This attitude is hardly rare in Christianity, as is well known. In fact, it seems to be the rule rather than the exception. It also appears in Shinran and his followers, which is in striking contrast to Buddhism's otherwise tolerant attitude. It is a curious fact that for all their intolerance, Paul, Shinran, and Luther emphasize their own humility and unworthiness before God or Amida. Yet this dual personality is hardly an accidental peculiarity. It results necessarily from their understanding of grace.

### IV

If grace-monism has the above consequence by virtue of its formal basis in the authority of holy tradition, its effect on ethics in general is even worse. What has man to do if grace does everything? Does his behavior have any significance at all? Does not the distinction between good and evil become untenable, or if it is maintained, does it not indicate a mistrust of the grace which is valid for sinners but not for the just? As Paul asked in Romans 6:1, "should we persist in sin in order that grace increase?"

Our three authorities, in any case, do not think so. When they encounter such ideas in friends and opponents they see in them only a misunderstanding of their teaching. But are they not the ones responsible for that through their own exaggerated formulations? Perhaps the most fatal of all such exaggerated formulations is Luther's pastoral advice to a prince, advice which he certainly did not intend for the public: *pecca fortiter sed fortius fide et gaude* (sin strongly but strongly in faith and joy). But can life really be divided in this way into separate spheres, into an existence in sin and an existence in grace? Are the usual commands of the law valid in the sphere of sin, which they uncover or

keep within limits, while grace cancels these commands or gives them a new function? But where and how does faith function as the fulfillment of the law?

Paul, Shinran, and Luther are acquainted with these questions from their own deliberations as well as from their intellectual environments. Their ways of dealing with them, however, only puzzled their followers. All three recognize the distinctness of three different areas: an unsaved area, an area in which grace is already effective, and an area in which salvation has reached completion. The first is the existing world in which man in need of salvation finds himself. For Paul this is the world of death which is destined to pass away. It stands under the rule of evil powers and men in this world are, through the law of those powers, subject to sin (Romans 7:7f.) and they sigh with all creation for salvation (Romans 8:19f.). According to Shinran, all life has always been in the circle of karma, i.e., each life is in a condition corresponding to its behavior in its preceding form of existence.<sup>21</sup> For Luther, God's good creation has been ruined through the fall into sin of the first Men. Their progeny stand under the curse of original sin, cannot fulfill God's command, and therefore cannot withstand the final judgment.

Biblical and Buddhist faith also know of a salvation out of this calamitous world through the Messiah of divine and sacred history or through the appearance of the Buddha. In Biblical as in Buddhist faith the savior has different forms. The Messiah of the Old Testament is not the Christ which the New Testament recognizes in Jesus, and the Buddhology with regard to Amida belief is unique within Buddhism. But Christ and Amida have in common an effect on the life of the believer in the existing world. That holds true even though their activity of salvation aims at what lies beyond this world, the Kingdom of God or Nirvana, which for the Amida believer means ultimately the extinction of the Pure Land.

By virtue of being bound with Christ, Paul knows himself, with all believers, in his "inner self," to be already removed into the world of the resurrection, although he yet lives "according to the flesh" in the world of sin (Romans 7:22f.). Likewise, Shinran says of the believer that although he is

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<sup>21</sup> On karma and being partially freed from it, see discussions in Glossary to *The Kyōgyōshinbō*, p. 257 f.



still under the compulsion of karma, he is, in spirit, already freed from it in Nirvana.<sup>22</sup> The literal distinction of two such areas and, simultaneously, the maintenance of the identity of the believer within them are also found in Luther's idea of the Christian being both "justified and a sinner at the same time." It is also found in the elaboration of this idea in Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms and in the division of the function of the law into a civil function, which orders the common life, and into an elenctic function, which shows men their sinfulness and the necessity of the forgiving grace of God.

With reference to Paul's requirement of works of faith as the fruit of a free and joyful fulfillment of the law made possible by the new being of the believer, Luther adjoins his *tertius usus legis* (third use of the law) to the civil use of the law and to the elenctic use of the law which prepares one for the acceptance of grace. This *tertius usus legis* has its parallel in the Amida believer's idea of becoming a Bodhisattva. He, like Amida, leaves the Pure Land in order to take up mercifully those yet in ignorance and to lead them to the way of salvation.<sup>23</sup>

One cannot say that Paul or Luther are any more successful than Shinran in making clear how the believer, who belongs both to this world and to the world of salvation, maintains his identity. Nor are they any more successful than Shinran in demonstrating the necessity and possibility of good works proceeding from grace, where these works can not belong to the merit of the believer. The conflicts about nomism in Lutheranism demonstrate all of these points no more no less than do the charges of libertinism against which Paul and Shinran had to defend themselves.

More obviously and with greater portent than in their theories of knowing and of metaphysics, the problem of their common doctrine of salvation is demonstrable in its practical ethical consequences. One may, of course, ask whether the ethical problem is the consequence of their theory or whether

<sup>22</sup> In reference to the effectiveness of Amida's name: "So says Shinran in the *Tannishō*: 'While my body is in the world of karma, my mind (spirit) is in the Pure Land of Amida,' " *Collected Writings*, p. 74. On the basis of this statement Suzuki arrives at an *bōi me* similar to Paul's in I Corinthians 7:24, and with the corresponding ethical consequences.

<sup>23</sup> Suzuki opposes this idea of the return of the Bodhisattva, which is found in all forms of Mahayana Buddhism, to his understanding of the Christian belief in the beyond. See his deficient polemic in *Collected Writings*, p. 61 f.

their theory is formulated to serve the practical purpose of answering the problem of meaning. In any case, there is a very close relation here between theory and practice. The fact of the matter is that this relation has a disastrous effect on any religious mythology or philosophical speculation which in any way tries to locate the answer to the question about the meaning of existence in a teachable, doctrinal form. To state but one aspect of the problem, in religious mythology and philosophical speculation about existence, three dimensions are given consideration: the world in which man finds himself; man, who seeks for meaning; and the transcendence of the divine, which functions to reconcile the former two. None of these can be objectified. Not the world, for it is something we can never really grasp as a whole. Not man, because we men are always something other than what we know ourselves to be. Not transcendence, because it is no longer transcendence if we can make statements about it. Nevertheless, we must ask the question about the meaning of existence, and we have to try to find an answer and to live according to this answer. And we can do none of these without speaking objectively about what cannot be objectified, without treating them as objects for us, the thinking subjects.

The unavoidability of confronting this state of affairs becomes all the more distressing the more we become aware of the subjectivity of our thought. It becomes less and less so to the degree that we are able to extinguish our consciousness of ourselves as subjects. On the one hand, the state of being self-conscious of the subjective problem carries within itself the stimulus to ever new searches for and attempts at possibilities of meaning and their realization, even if these possibilities remain only partial and their realizations ever questionable. The state of the extinction of consciousness of oneself as subject, on the other hand, seems to have already reached its goal, to be participant in salvation through freedom from the question about salvation. As regards the former, it is to be asked if one should really speak of salvation where there is only an endless, unceasing striving for salvation. With regard to the latter it is to be asked, who would want to receive grace if grace means the extinction of its recipient?

## THE CONCEPT OF GRACE

### V

One might be tempted to find the subject-object type of thought in Paul and Luther or generally in a Western-Christian understanding of grace and way of life, and to find the type of thought which extinguishes awareness of the subjectivity of thought in Shinran or generally in the Far Eastern Buddhist understanding of grace and way of life. Consequently, one might be inclined as a Buddhist representative, with reference to Buddhists' antipathy to the Biblical-Christian history of the passion and resurrection in mind,<sup>24</sup> to become convinced of one's superiority, even perhaps to the point of wanting to set about refuting and converting Christians belonging to the other type. One might be tempted as a Christian representative to do the same thing, with the assertion that Buddhism has to do only with forms of world-fleeing self-salvation or non-salvation. The inclination to such attitudes might be strong, but the attitude is inappropriate and only leads thought astray.

In all attempts to understand spiritual traditions different from one's own—and in an attempt to understand one's own tradition as well—it ought to be considered that concepts of one tradition always have, for those who live within that tradition, a definite significance and value which are not immediately comprehensible and can be easily misunderstood by persons of another tradition. We ourselves should regard our own interpretation, not only of Shinran but also of the Gospel of the apostle Paul and of the reformer Luther, with the same reserve.

Even with this concession, however, we still refuse to see, on the one hand, Paul, Luther, and their spiritual world as representative of that type of thought characterized by conceptual-objective thinking and its consequent active realization of meaning, and on the other hand, Shinran and his spiritual world as representative of the nullification of the subject-object scheme in the mystical void of enlightenment and the consequent unworldliness of the one so saved. The origin, form, and aim of grace in Christianity are very different from what we find in Buddhism. While they thus show different fundamental tendencies, they also have fundamental tendencies in common. In the Christian

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Suzuki's remarks on the impression which the image of the crucified Christ and blood theology makes on the Buddhist (*Collected Writings*) p. 59 f.

and Buddhist concepts of grace two types of thought and ethical consequences may be discerned albeit in various forms.

For this reason a Christianization of Buddhism or a Buddhaization of Christianity comes into question only if we can thereby gain a deeper insight into the problematic of the concept of grace in the three religious thinkers. Mutual fertilization can, in fact, prove very fruitful. In order to indicate how that might proceed, we shall cite in conclusion two possibilities. One has to do with theoretical perception, and the other with the sphere of ethics.

In contrast to the necessity of reference to the holy act of Christ in history for the grace of God and the uncertainty and ambiguity of its asserted historicity, an enviable timelessness and clarity is characteristic of the promise of Amida that makes the basis of believing trust. For Shinran, salvation is not bound, as it is for Paul and Luther, to an event occurring once in time, an event dimensionally different from all other human history and to be believed, against all other experience, as a miracle. Certainly the promise of Amida in which Shinran trusts presupposes the incarnation of Amida and the statement of the promise. To be sure, this is also a unique and supernatural event, just as Christ is for Paul and Luther. But the object of Shinran's faith is not the facticity of Amida's promise not to enter Nirvana until all beings have been saved, but the content of that promise alone. This content is nothing but the complement to Shinran's own entanglement in karma, an entanglement from which he wants to be freed. If he first asked if the promise really were given by Amida, he would no longer be wholly trusting in the promise. To believe that Amida really made the promise means to trust in it completely. Wherever and whenever the Nembutsu is thought or spoken in this sense, even if only once, there is in it, in every place and in every time, the content of truth and reality. The name of Amida stands for a timelessly valid content, and that is the acknowledgment of guilt and its forgiveness. The person who accepts himself as he is, who is reconciled with himself, has done enough penance and is able to bring others to their own reconciliation. He has become a Bodhisattva.

There is also a Christian faith which understands itself in this way, even if it is not the faith of the churchly institution of salvation and its official confessions. But Paul knew such faith when he said that, speaking of one "who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly," "his faith is

## THE CONCEPT OF GRACE

reckoned as righteousness" (Romans 4:5). And the young Luther knew it, too, in his *theologia crucis*, in which he knew himself embraced by the love of God even in hell. Perhaps their followers in Christianity can gain strength in facing the risks inherent in the immediacy of grace through the example of Shinran's piety. On the other hand, the followers of Shinran in Buddhism could learn from the difficulties which Christianity has fallen into as a consequence of its historicizing and institutionalizing of grace. They could learn to set aside the vestiges of such misunderstanding regarding Amida's promise and become more aware of its complete immediacy.

We turn from discussion of historical origins of grace to that of the problem of the working of grace in history. The mode of this working is not independent of the idea of history which the believer has, the idea of the historical frame in which grace effects itself. Paul, Shinran, and Luther expect the completion of the effect of grace not within but beyond history. Paul expects it in the coming of the kingdom of God. Luther expects it partly in the coming of the Kingdom, but above all in heaven. Shinran expects it in being reborn in the Pure Land. It already occurs for him in enlightenment or at the moment of death, but in any case it means an escape from the eternal cycle of endless births. In this sense all three have a negative attitude toward the existing world and its future. And yet there are fundamental differences to be seen. Paul expects the end of the world and the dawning of the Kingdom of God in the immediate future. Luther shares this expectation in its negative part, but he distinguishes between the two kingdoms of worldly and spiritual rule, as has already been mentioned. In Buddhism, however, history has no end and no aim, just as it never had a beginning. According to Paul, one should act in this world as if one no longer belonged to it, and one should not think that one's own act, influenced by the reality of the Kingdom, can or should change the existent world. In spite of its wholly different basis, the Bodhisattva-being of Amida belief comes to a similar ethical orientation. Luther, on the other hand, with his two distinct ethical spheres, reckons with the continued existence of this world, something Paul did not allow for. Out of his own experience Luther rejects monasticism, which had earlier in a specific way taken the place of the Kingdom of God which did not come, and he re-evaluates the Christian life in worldly vocations by calling it a service to God.

## THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

Although the concept of secularism had appeared originally in connection with the rejection of monasticism and the disowning of the church by the state, the concept today is used in the more comprehensive sense of designating all forms of that thought which brings the supernatural into the worldly. This process began in Christianity along with its emergence into the world. That led at first, to be sure, to the arising of the church and its belief in the beyond. Only in the modernity of the Western world has this process moved beyond that churchly ersatz for earliest Christian eschatology. Belief in the future, which gives wings to modern Western culture, rests in large part on the Biblical expectation of the Kingdom of God, a belief which the Buddhist world, because of its different idea of history, does not share.

Unlike Hinayana Buddhism, which is actually a religion for monks, Mahayana represents a secularization, and it is significant that Shinran, just as Luther did, left the monastery and married. Because Amida Buddhism knows neither a supernatural teleology nor a natural one as it developed in the West, it is content with the salvation of the individual and sees this salvation in terms of becoming free of the evil world, not in its betterment. If Amida Buddhism today sees itself challenged in its contact with old and new forms of Western secularism, it is also faced with the question of whether it can better validate the grace of Amida than can Christianity the grace of Christ.

With this very aspect of the matter in mind, it should be clear that the question about the concept of grace in Paul, Shinran, and Luther, with which we have occupied ourselves here, is truly far more than a question for the history of religions. It should also be clear that the ultimate destination of the forces which were generated by those men and, therefore, our common future as well, is to be decided on the basis of our understanding of grace.