

DENGYŌ DAISHI AND GERMAN THEOLOGY

DENGYŌ Daishi (傳教大師), the great Reformer of the Heian Era, who carried the Chinese school of Tendai to Japan and gave it a home on Mt. Hiei ; Dengyō Daishi, the protégé of the Emperor Kwammu and friend of Kōbō Daishi ; Dengyō Daishi who opposed the Nara Priests, fought the principles of the Hossō sect, and taught the identity of Śākyamuni, Yakushi Nyorai, and Amida—what has this Dengyō, the eleven hundredth anniversary of whose death we have just celebrated, to do with German theology ?

Their association seems arbitrary and paradoxical, yet it may not be so forced as it appears at first glance.

When we speak here of German theology, we think immediately of the *Theologia Germanica* of the anonymous Frankfort Knight of the Teutonic Order, the famous work which constituted a landmark in the Christian theology of the dying fourteenth century, and which was brought out in modern form in 1907 under the title, *Das Büchlein vom vollkommenen Leben* (*The Book of Perfect Life*). But those theologians also, Master Eckhart, Tauler, and Suso, who were intellectually akin to the Frankforter, are understood here to be representative of German theology. We must also include Martin Luther, who published the *Theologia Germanica* in 1516 under the title, *Ein deutsch Theologia*, and who wrote in the preface to this Frankforter's work : "This noble book, poor and rude though it be in words and human wisdom, is so much the more precious in its art and divine wisdom. And I will say, though it be boasting of myself and 'I speak as a fool', that next to the Bible and St. Augustine, no book hath ever come into my hands, whence I have learnt, or would wish to learn more of what God, and Christ, and man

and all things are." We may also reckon Jakob Böhme in with them, as well as every other German theologian who understood Christianity in a form apart from the formalistic church doctrines, and who understood it in the deeper manner which was peculiar to the men mentioned above.

All these divines—and Luther was surely one of them before he lost himself again in a net of dogmas—have this in common with Dengyō Daishi: they are mystics. They all believed in the comprehension of the supersensible, the divine, the transcendental, not through the senses, nor through reason, but through their own inner experience, through direct intellectual intuition, contemplation, and perceptual experience in a state of ecstasy. They all believed that they were able to partake of the union with the Divine Being—the "unio mystica"—in an inconceivable, mystical manner by means of absorption in the depths of their own soul. As for that which especially concerns the founder of the Tendai sect, his teaching, so far as its practical side is taken into consideration, is built upon the most profound mystic system that Buddhism has ever called forth, the *Maka Shikwan* (摩訶止觀), or the "Great Meditation," of Chisha Daishi (智者大師), the founder of the Chinese Tendai sect. Dengyō Daishi, however, made his foundation still broader by including the mysticism of the Shingon and Zen schools, so that one might well say that the mystical element was never so strongly emphasised by the founder of any sect of Mahayana Buddhism as it was by Dengyō Daishi.

There are a great number of very eminent and deserving scholars—we refer here to the Western scholars only—who have not been able to see the slightest trace of mysticism in Buddhism. Some define Buddhism as a "rationalistic atheism"; others as a "practical system of morals"; while those of the third group see in the teachings of the Buddha an astronomy in pictures. These scholars cannot see the forest for the trees;

they are so thoroughly philologists that they cannot grasp theological problems. It is only recently that a few isolated Western scholars have been aware of the mystical base of Buddhism. But scarcely does the road to an unbiassed conception of Buddhist principles seem clear when another turnpike is raised, for these scholars conclude: Buddhism may be mysticism, but it is absolutely different from Christian mysticism; for Buddhism postulates (as all Oriental mysticism does) the total annihilation, the consummate absorption of the individual soul in the Infinite, whilst the European mystics seek instead of the suppression of the individual soul-life a greater intensity of it. According to these theoreticians, the foundation of Christian mysticism is positive and active, whilst that of Oriental (especially, Buddhist) mysticism is negative and passive.

If this characterisation does not prove entirely true even for Hinayana, in so far as it categorically denies the existence of an individual soul, the *ātman*, how much less does it apply to Mahayana Buddhism. How little negative and passive Mahayana is, is conclusively shown by Tendai Buddhism which was represented by Dengyō Daishi.

The Tendai philosophy is built upon the teachings of Nāgārjuna, whose "Eight Noes" are sufficiently known. They are:

" Without origin, also without end;
Not eternal, nor yet cut short;
Not one, and not many;
Without coming, as without going."

Such a definition of the Absolute seems to be purest nihilism, but it is not more nihilism than when Jakob Böhme says of Eternal Love: "It cannot, therefore, be compared with anything, for it is deeper than the I; it is, therefore, in all things as a Nothing, because it is not conceivable. And since it is Nothing, it is free from all things, and is the sole

Good, so that one may not declare what it is." That the Perfect is Nothing is clearly expressed in the *Theologia Germanica* also. There we read: "The things which are in part can be apprehended, known, and expressed; but the Perfect cannot be apprehended, known, or expressed by any creature as creature. Therefore, the Perfect is called Nothing: not being of the same kind, the creature as creature cannot know nor apprehend it, name nor conceive it."

If one, nevertheless, sees only nihilism in the negative formulation of Nāgārjuna's *Chū Ron* (中論), or *Madhyamika Śāstra*, which begins with the "Eight Noes," point out to him that Dengyō Daishi's Tendai philosophy depends not so much upon the *Madhyamika Śāstra* as upon the *Dai Chi Do Ron* (大智度論), or Mahāprajñā-Pāramitā-Śāstra, which also is ascribed to Nāgārjuna and states clearly that back of the negative formulation of the Absolute, the Positive in its highest power is hidden.

This second śāstra is of all the writings the most characteristic of the philosophical content of the Tendai doctrine. Its religious content is best expressed in the *Hokkekyō* (法華經), or *Saddharma-Pundarīka-Sūtra*, which teaches that all living creatures without distinction possess the Buddha-nature (佛性). The use which the *Hokkekyō* makes of the word "Buddha" is not less free than the use which the *Theologia Germanica* and kindred mysticism makes of the word "God" or "Christ." Both books understand by these words, the "Perfect," the "One," the "Truth," the "Highest Good." "Good," says the Frankforter, "need not first come into the soul; it is already there as yet unrecognised,"—and he expresses a conviction there which may be considered the fundamental principle of the *Hokkekyō*.

Dengyō Daishi defended most energetically this central truth of the *Hokkekyō*, that all creatures without distinction possess the Buddha-nature, against the Hossō (法相) priests

who clung to the doctrine of Five Natures (五性) and who asserted that only the creatures who had the Bodhisattva-nature and so-called undetermined nature (不定性) could become Buddha, whilst those endowed with human and deva nature, with śrāvaka-nature, and Pratyeka-Buddha-nature were excluded from Buddhahood for eternity.

This is not the place to go into this controversy, so rich in dialectical snares, between Dengyō Daishi and the Nara priests—at the bottom of it on one side lies the belief in the absolute dissimilarity of human talents and the moral forces which fill the universe; on the other side the belief in the fundamental unity of the universe and the nature of all creatures.

In this latter comprehension Dengyō Daishi is at one with Christian mysticism, which proceeds from the hypothesis: “God reposes in all things, since He gave Himself to all,” and which gives rise to the claim: “Man must redeem Him—God—by creating!”

There is a great deal in the *Theologia Germanica* about the “Godlike man.” It says among other things: “Love in a Godlike man is pure, untinged, and of good will. Therefore, all things, animate and inanimate, human and infra-human, must be loved there, and only good wished and done to all. Let one do to a Godlike man whatever one will, good or evil, to please or to aggrieve; nay, if some one should kill him a hundred times and he should return to life, he would be obliged to love the person who had killed him and who had done him so much injustice and evil; he should be intent upon his welfare only and do for him the very best he can provided only that the other party will accept such kindness. Behold, where such a Godlike man is, there is the best, the most noble, and to God the most appropriate life that there can be.... And should the same man die a thousand deaths, every misfortune fall upon him which may befall a creature, yet would he rather suffer all that than to be deprived of this

noble life. And if he could exchange his life for that of an angel, not even then would he trade!"

Now this conception of the Godlike man corresponds, word for word, to the conception of the Bosatsu (Bodhisattva) which Dengyō Daishi, relying upon the *Hokkekyō* and the *Bonmokyō* (*Brahmajāla Sūtra*), represented. It is the duty of the Bosatsu to release the God in man through works. And every one who dedicates himself to the task, is, according to Dengyō Daishi, a Bosatsu, even if the talents of the individuals—he distinguishes fifty-two different stages of Bodhisattvahood—differ according to their rank. If the Mahayana doctrine, as it existed in Japan before Dengyō Daishi—the so-called elementary or provisional Mahayana Buddhism—had recognised the existence of priestly Bosatsus only, Dengyō Daishi went a step further and added the lay Bosatsus to those who made up the priesthood. "Every one [that is, every true Mahayana believer] is a Bosatsu,"—is the basic principle of Dengyō. This principle may be compared with the conception of general priesthood entertained by Martin Luther. And according to the Frankforter, the possession of Perfect Life and not sacerdotalism or monasticism makes one an "Imitator" and "Servant" of Christ.

Dengyō's disciples, the Tendai priests, in particular, were supposed to regard themselves as Bosatsus, and to labour as Bosatsus by placing their whole strength in the service of the State, which was understood to be the moral community based on the family, and as such, an incorporation of Universal and Eternal Truth. In accordance herewith, Dengyō divided the students of Tendai into three groups: (1) Those who distinguished themselves by singular virtue and eloquence should remain living on Mt. Hiei at the conclusion of their twelve years of study, become leaders of all the others, and be titled "Kokuho" (國寶), or "Treasure of the State"; (2) Those who were possessed of great eloquence, but who had not

distinguished themselves by any unusual virtues, should be "Kokushi" (國師), or "Teachers of the State"; (3) whilst those who had distinguished themselves by their virtues, but who had not the gift of eloquence, should be called "Kokuyo" (國用), or "Assets of the State." The Kokushi and Kokuyo were made "Dempo" (傳法) and provincial "Kōshi" (講師) by governmental charter. The Dempo, or the "Deliverers of Religion," had their residence for the most part in the large temples of Nara and Kyōto; the Kōshi, on the other hand, were lecturers who were on duty from four to six years in the various State (*Kokubun*) temples of the provinces. Here in the annual rest-period (*Ango*, 安居) of ninety days which corresponds to the Indian "Vassa," or rainy season, and which lasted from the sixteenth day of the fourth month to the fifteenth day of the seventh month, they recited and explained the sūtras and śāstras before the congregation, according to the ancient custom. The laymen would prove their appreciation of this work by giving all kinds of presents.

In the regulation which contain the foregoing provisions, Dengyō recommends the collection of the gifts to the lecturers in the warehouse of the provincial governors, their careful auditing, and use for the public welfare; as for the improvement of pools and ditches which serve to irrigate the ricefields, the cultivation of unproductive fields (which had either been laid waste through flooding, or which had never yet been made arable), the re-terracing of worn-down terrain, the building of bridges and ships, the setting-out of trees (especially fruit-trees), the cultivation of hemp and useful grasses, the deepening of springs, and for all other things which conduce to the well-being of the province and of the individual, including the reciting of sūtras and the "edification of the human mind." Yet these gifts of the congregation were never to be used for agricultural and commercial enterprises, that is, the collective capital was not to be lent out at interest for purposes of gain.

The tendency to be of service to the State, that is, to the group, was emphasised in this regulation of the Tendai sect by Dengyō in a manner which is without precedent in ancient Indian, and even in Chinese Buddhism. So strongly did Dengyō Daishi consider "care for the State" as the chief task of the Tendai priests that he wished to see his whole religion made the state religion. "O make this the state religion!" he prayed at the grave of Shotoku Taishi, he who was looked upon as Shotoku Taishi reincarnated.

What is, then, this concern for the State (that is, for the good of his compatriots), if not the fundamental principle of "viriliter agite!"—of "manly conduct"—which we find so much stressed in the *Theologia Germanica*? Is it not the affirmation of life in the highest sense?—even though Ignorance has said of the German mystics and the Buddhists without distinction that they fled into the deserts to escape life.

The founder of the Tendai sect as well as the *German Theology* demand activity in the most forcible manner for the good of all. They are both, nevertheless, as one in rejecting outward piety [piety of works]; both believe in a sudden and complete conversion without the accumulation of merit; both repudiate the ceremonial law which had formerly been deemed binding by the representatives of their religion. Luther exclaims: "Your cowl, your shaven head, your celibacy, your obedience, your poverty, your works, and your merit, of what use shall they be to you? Of what avail is the Mosaic Law?"—and in the third month of the year 818, Dengyō Daishi makes a declaration which is not less memorable: "Henceforth I will never accept the merits of a Shōmon (Śrāvaka), and will always turn my back upon the Hinayana ceremonies. I swear that I will repudiate the two hundred and fifty precepts."

Even Chisha Daishi, the great Founder of the Chinese Tendai, whom a later age will learn to honour as the Chinese Plotinus, adhered at least formally to the Hinayanistic Moral

Law (Vinaya) of two hundred and fifty articles, and represented a combined Hinayana-Mahayana Code. The great service of Dengyō in the field of ethics was that he threw completely overboard the Hinayana Law as obligatory for all Buddhist priests, and recognised only the pure Mahayana Law, namely: the Ten Greater and the Forty-eight Lesser Precepts of the *Bonmokyō* (梵網經). It was not that man should merit salvation through the keeping of these precepts; the keeping of the precepts had rather the psychological meaning of preparing the soul for the highest life by annihilating the opposition of the flesh, by breaking self-will, and by bringing about that state of "willingness" and "resignation" which is prerequisite to the "union mystica." The remainder of the moral actions which Dengyō Daishi retained in his ethical system, by obliging his disciples to keep the 58 commandments of the Bonmo Sutra, should serve solely for purification, which must be accomplished before the spirit can be disclosed for meeting and union with the Divine. When this union had been consummated, the keeping of the precepts followed naturally. For the Godlike man is necessarily a moral man. Morality (called *kai*, 戒, or *śīla*) was, then, not something which existed as a thing in itself, but stood in the closest relationship with contemplation (*jō*, 定, or *dhyāna*) and the transcendental wisdom (*e*, 慧, or *prajñā*) which resulted from it. As a matter of fact, the keeping of the precepts was considered to follow the mystical absorption and the enlightenment connected therewith. The "inner" man united with the Tathāgata kept all precepts necessarily and spontaneously, in Dengyō's opinion.

We see once more that there was the closest agreement between the Founder of the Tendai sect and the author of the *Theologia Germanica*, who says: "One must never forget, however, that God's commandments, counsels, and all His teachings refer only to the Inner Man, as he is united with

God. Where this occurs, the outer man will be sufficiently directed and taught by the Inner Man, so that one does not need any outer commandments and teachings."—"All that is sound and good," we read in another place, "even the Good which is God Himself, will never make man virtuous, good, or blissful so long as it is something extrinsic to the soul, and likewise with sin and evil." And in a third place we read: "Eternal Bliss does not rest with the Many nor with Diversity, but with the One and with Unity." That sounds as if Dengyō himself had said it, just as the words which the Frankforter quotes from St. Paul are congenial to him: "Those who are directed, penetrated and guided by God's spirit, are children of God and do not stand under the Law."

The intellectual kinship of Martin Luther, the Founder of German Protestantism, and Shinran Shōnin, the Founder of Japanese Protestantism, has been pointed out many times. Here lies the parallelism in the clear light of day. Perhaps these lines may tend to make clear the less widely known connection which exists between the German mystics as the precursors of the German Reformation, and Dengyō Daishi, who, on his side, constituted the bridge which led to Shinran Shōnin and the Japanese Reformation of the thirteenth century.

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