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A CHRISTIAN APOLOGETIC TO THE DOCTRINE OF GRACE IN SHIN BUDDHISM

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INTRODUCTION

Pluralists have claimed that Christianity and Shin Buddhism are similar in their approaches to salvation.[1] It is claimed that one cannot accomplish or obtain salvation alone, but instead must have a mediator. Many contemporaries, including past Dalai Lamas, have made the claim that Jesus is a bodhisattva similar to that of *Amida*.[2] To further demonstrate their claim they point to reformers of Christianity and Shin Buddhism. Martin Luther and Shinran, a key figure and founder in Japanese Pure Land, both lived around the same time period and had many similar ideas about the lack of human ability to either be reconciled to God or to obtain *nirvana*.[3]

Recently, due to increased interest in comparing world religions and the increased interaction between Christians and Shin Buddhists caused by globalization, it has been said that the grace given by Buddha *Amida* is comparable to that of Christianity. The argument is that somehow *Amida* and Christ are similar in purpose, both being claimed be bodhisattvas, have been interpreted similarly in such a way as to make the religions seem similar.[4] The reformers of each religion have been shown similar in theology and

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[1] Huston Smith and Philip Novak, "The Flowering of Faith: Buddhism's Pure Land Tradition." *Buddhism: A Concise Introduction*. (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003), 185-198.

[2] Donald S. Lopez and Steven C. Rockefeller, "Symposium Panel on the Christ and the Bodhisattva." *The Christ and the Bodhisattva*. (SUNY series in Buddhist studies. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 229-256.

[3] Alfred Bloom, *Shinran's Gospel of Pure Grace*. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1965), 45.

[4] Clark Strand, "*God Meets Amida*." Reading and Discussion, How to Believe in God: Whether you Believe in Religion or Not (from Buddhist Churches of America Jodo Shinshu Center, Berkeley, CA), April 24, 2009. http://cbe-bca.org/docs/strand.pdf.

doctrine. Some have claimed that if Shin Buddhism offers salvation by grace alone, Christianity is no longer a unique religion.

This thesis will offer an apologetic defense on why grace in Shin Buddhism is not comparable to that of Christianity. This is to defend the faith against those that would propagate pluralism and to defend the uniqueness of Christ himself and his superiority to that of bodhisattvas, ultimately claiming the superiority of Christianity as the truth in light of various world religions. The second purpose is to paint an accurate picture of Shin Buddhism and its meanings behind the use of the word grace. It is also needed to demonstrate fairness and respect between the two different faiths by presenting accurate representations, especially when considering evangelism. Grace in Shin Buddhism is given by *Amida* so one may enter the Pure Land.[5] While having assurance of birth in the Pure Land, at death one will reach the Pure Land which is synonymous with *nirvana*.[6] Grace in Shin Buddhism, where through human effort it is impossible to break the cycle of *samsara*; stands in contrast to that of Christianity, which ultimately our best efforts are futile in being reconciled to God for our salvation.

The position of this thesis will assume the exclusive claims of Christ made in Scripture as a vital part of the Christian faith. These claims are what make Christianity unique among the religions. Upon examination in detail of the two faiths, comparisons break down and seem ill fit. Any connection between the two faiths is nothing more than a misrepresentation of the key figures of each religion, including salvific figures and

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[5] Bloom, *Shinran's Gospel of Pure Grace*. 32.

[6] Shinran and Dennis Hirota, "The True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way," *The Collected Works of Shinran*. (Shin Buddhism translation series. Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwangji-ha, 1997), Vol. 1, 117.

reformers. What is meant and implied by the word grace in Shin Buddhism is generally misunderstood, as grace in western culture carries a Christian connotation within its understanding due to the historical influence of the religion. The two figures could not accurately be claimed to accomplish similar purposes because of differing cosmologies which give different roles to each figure.

This thesis will focus on Shin Buddhism thought from the *Jodo Shinshu* School, or True Pure Land School.[7] Shin thought is part of the Mahayana tradition, but goes a step further by claiming that it is impossible to obtain enlightenment or *nirvana* through any Buddhist practices relying on self-effort.[8] Instead one relies on the grace of a *bodhisattva*. A *bodhisattva* is a person who vows that after attaining enlightenment they will refuse to go into *nirvana,* but instead stay in a transcendent realm where they aid and assist those in this world to obtain entrance into a "pure land."[9] Once this Pure Land is reached, the cycle of *samsara* is broken and it is impossible to retrogress to any previous state or incarnation.[10] Instead this Pure Land is the same as *nirvana*. The only way to gain entrance into this pure land is to call on Buddha *Amida* and place one's faith in him.[11]

A defense of the Christian faith against such claims is necessary in the present age. First this thesis will examine the human predicament in each religion and how this

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[7] Can also be translated True Pure Land Sect; see Smith and Novak, *Buddhism: A Concise Introduction*. 193.

[8] Jōdo Shinshū Honganji-ha (Japan). *Jodo Shinshu: A Guide*. (Kyoto, Japan: Hongwanji International Center, 2002), 72.

[9] Lopez and Rockefeller, *The Christ and the Bodhisattva*. 83-85.

[10] Yoshifumi Ueda, Shinran, and Dennis Hirota, *Shinran: An Introduction to His Thought*. (Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1989), 172.

[11] Bloom, *Shinran's Gospel of Pure Grace.* 45.

relates to human futility and the need for grace. The second chapter will take a look at the purpose of grace and the means by which such grace is achieved and obtained. In the third chapter the salvific figures of the faiths as the source and mediators that provides such grace. Why these figures are different both in origin and purpose will be examined. In the final section, the ultimate goals that the grace is given to achieve will be discussed, especially when it comes to the differences ontologically and teleologically that apply to their eternal destinies.

SHORT HISTORY OF SHIN BUDDHISM

Shin Buddhism is considered a school of Pure Land Buddhism, specifically *Jodo Shinshu* (True Pure Land School). It originated from Shinran (1173-1263), a disciple of Hōnen. Shinran had been born during a time of great political upheaval and corruption in the Buddhist *sangha*.[12] At the age of eight he joined a Tendai monastery.[13] It was originally at the monastery that Shinran learned of the *nembutsu* as a practice.[14] The *nembutsu* was a phrase, "*namo amida butsu*" or "I take refuge in the *Amida* Buddha."[15] Saying the *nembutsu* had originated as a practice from the Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life.[16] In this sutra, the bodhisattva *Dharmakara* (*Amida* Buddha), made the vow that if

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[12] Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism The Doctrinal Foundations*. (Library of religious beliefs and practices. London: Routledge, 2009), 254.

[13] Ross N. Reat, *Buddhism: A History*. (Berkeley, Calif: Asian Humanities Press, 1994), 202.

[14] Ueda, Shinran, and Hirota. *Shinran: An Introduction to His Thought*. 24.

[15] *Jodo Shinshu: A Guide*. 74.

[16] Shinran, Alfred Bloom, and Ruben L. F. Habito. *The Essential Shinran: A Buddhist Path of True Entrusting*. (Bloomington, Ind: World Wisdom, 2007), 77-78.

anyone would recite his name at least ten times, they would be heard by him and allowed to enter the Pure Land upon death. Such a hope was easier to fathom, since upon reaching the Pure Land, *nirvana* was to be easily attainable. After twenty years of practice at the Tendai monastery, Shinran described himself as one, "incapable of any other practice."[17] Shinran had become disillusioned with the seeming futility of his own efforts to attain enlightenment.

> "Even though I endeavor to attain a concentrated state of mind, the waves of mentation incessantly move. Even though I endeavor to meditate on the true aspect of mind, the clouds of false discrimination still hover about me."[18]

He saw himself as a being enslaved in lusts and desires. He had felt that hell would be his destiny, as nothing he tried would free him from his depravity. This is when he sought Hōnen who had established a school of Buddhism, *Jodo Shu* (Pure Land School), whose sole practice was reciting the *nembutsu*.

Shinran sat under Hōnen's instruction for about 6 years; until Hōnen's school came under political scrutiny leading to its closing.[19] Several disciples were executed, while Hōnen, Shinran, and others were sent into exile.[20] It was at this time Shinran begun to further develop his thought on Pure Land doctrine. The *nembutsu* was considered an easy practice and could be done by common people with no need to become a monk.

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[17] Shinran and Dennis Hirota, "A Record in Lament of Divergences," in *The Collected Works of Shinran*. (Shin Buddhism translation series. Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwangji-ha, 1997), Vol. 1, #2.

[18] Shinran cited in Shizutoshi Sugihira, *"The Nembutsu in Shin Buddhism," The Eastern Buddhist* 7, nos. 3-4 (July 1939), 353.

[19] Reat, *Buddhism: A History*. 202-203.

[20] Shinran, Bloom, and Habito, *The Essential Shinran: A Buddhist Path of True Entrusting*. 14.

Shinran had focused on repeatedly saying the *nembutsu*, but had come to the realization that this in itself was an attachment to the practice.[21] From that point on, he held that saying the *nembutsu* was an act of gratitude and entrusting of himself to the Vow.[22] Shinran completely entrusted himself to the *Amida* Buddha. There was no other practice that was necessary.

Today Shin Buddhism is the most popular form of Buddhism in Japan and has mission schools and temples established throughout the world including Australia, Europe, Kenya, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Mexico, Nepal, Canada (*Jodo Shinshu* Buddhist Temples of Canada), South America (especially Brazil), and the United States (Buddhist Churches of America) including the Honpa Honganji Mission of Hawaii.[23] Shin Buddhism has long been considered "America's best kept secret."[24] Shin Buddhism is made up of ten sects in Japan, which two of the largest are Nishi (West) Hongwanji and Higashi (East) Hongwanji. Based on both the expanse of Shin Buddhism and of its own doctrines, it is to be considered a missionary religion.[25] Evangelism for Shin Buddhists naturally flows out of their belief in the *Amida* Buddha's grace. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to offer a Christian apologetic of grace against those who would equate it to the grace offered in Shin Buddhism.

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[21] Ueda, Shinran, and Hirota, *Shinran: An Introduction to His Thought*. 36.

[22] Alfred Bloom, "Chapter 18: The Nembutsu." *Shin Buddhism in Modern Culture.* Online Course on Shin Buddhism. http://www.shindharmanet.com/course/.

[23] Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha. http://www.hongwanjihawaii.com/teachings.html.

[24] Alfred Bloom, *The Promise of Boundless Compassion: Shin Buddhism in Modern Context*. (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii, 2002) 1.

[25] *Jodo Shinshu: A Guide*. 86.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN LUTHER AND SHINRAN

From the Age of *Mappō* to the salvation of *Amida* Buddha realized in *shinjin*, it should be obvious that Shin Buddhism and Christianity have very different aims. However, they have been described as similar by some.[26] This argument is found in comparing the thought structure of Martin Luther and Shinran. Mainly there are similarities with their concepts of human futility in the effort for salvation and the doctrine of *simul justus et peccator* or both justified and a sinner of Luther. There has been some argument for grace monism. If grace is bestowed freely and is unmerited they must be similar or so the argument goes. Shinran has been called the Martin Luther of Japan and Karl Barth referred to Shin Buddhism as the "the most adequate and comprehensive and illuminating heathen parallel to Christianity."[27] Even the Jesuit Missionary, Francis Xavier thought the "Lutheran heresy" had reached Japan upon arriving there in 1549.[28] Ultimately however any comparisons and similarities break down at a certain level because the religions have very different outlooks on the human predicament and the goal of grace.

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[26] Paul Ingram, *"Shinran Shonin and Martin Luther: A Soteriological Comparison." Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 39, no. 4 (December 1971): 430-47.

[27] Karl Barth, G. W. Bromiley, and Thomas F Torrance.*Church Dogmatics / Prolegomena to Church Dogmatics Vol.1, Part 2. The Doctrine of the Word of God*. (Edinburgh: T. &. T. Clark, 1956)

[28] Fritz Buri, *"The Concept of Grace in Paul, Shinran, and Luther." Eastern Buddhist* 9, no. 2 (2004), 30.

CHAPTER I- THE HUMAN PREDICAMENT

Shin Buddhism like all other schools within both Mahayana and Theravada share the same essential teaching of the human predicament. All beings are trapped in the cycle of *samsara*, the cycle of death and rebirth. Since life is characterized by suffering caused by desire according to the Four Noble Truths, one would want rid themselves of desire. This desire is based on ignorance found in the identity of self or the ego. Since all things are transient, there is a strong sense of impermanence and death that causes one to cling to a sense of self. This self is thought to be real and permanent by the individual. The self or ego builds both upon around and upon itself in effort to secure itself through attachment and gain. In fact, *karma* in the Sanskrit has the meaning to "make" or "create."[29] However in the Buddhist mind, none of the things in this world bring forth anything that is eternally satisfying. Every craving and desire, even though temporarily satisfied, always returns. This leads to a lack of fulfillment and suffering.

The goal of Buddhism is to become a buddha or an "awakened one."[30] A buddha is one who has awakened from the illusion of self and attachment. They rid themselves of the dualistic thinking that distinguishes the self from others and objects. This is not an attempt at nihilism, but to see reality as it truly is through non-discriminative wisdom. This reality is known in Buddhism as *nirvana* is a state of oneness, bliss, and most importantly, one without attachment. Buddhahood was generally sought by following the

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[29] Nishu Utsuki, *The Shin Sect, A School of Mahāyāna Buddhism*. (Kyoto: Bureau of Buddhist Books, 1937), 15-16.

[30] Ueda, Shinran, and Hirota, *Shinran: An Introduction to His Thought*. (Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1989), 58.

teaching of *Sakyamuni* on the Eightfold Path.[31] Following the right practices would lead to enlightenment. However Shinran takes the human predicament to another level with his doctrine of the Age of *Mappō*. What causes Shin Buddhism to differ from all other forms of Buddhism outside the Pure Land sects is that Shinran holds that attaining enlightenment in this world was not possible, while other sects do.[32]

THE AGE OF MAPPO

The human predicament in Shin Buddhism may be accurately described as the Age of *Mappō* or "latter days." The Age of *Mappō* is a degenerate age in which the *Dharma* teachings begin to decline and become impossible to be put into practice. Any human effort exerted has no effect in breaking the cycle of *samsara*. To put it simply, it is impossible for anyone living in the Age of *Mappō* to commit any truly altruistic deed or action. Shinran believed that people were enslaved to their desires with no hope of achieving liberation on their own. Since it was an age of increased defilements, minds were corrupted "like poisonous snakes and evil dragons."[33] Such an existence was not due to something intrinsic in human nature, but rather a result of the age they found themselves in. Even those being aware of condition of those living in the Age of *Mappō*,

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[31] The Eightfold Path: right view, thought, speech, conduct, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and meditation.

[32] Hee-Sung Keel, *Understanding Shinran: A Dialogical Approach*. (Nanzan studies in Asian religions, [6]. Fremont, Calif: Asian Humanities Press, 1995), 154.

[33] Shinran and Dennis Hirota. "Pure Land Hymns on the Right, Semblace, and Last Dharma Ages." *The Collected Works of Shinran*. (Shin Buddhism translation series. Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwangji-ha, 1997) Vol. 1, 400.

could do nothing to save themselves. Shinran believed that the Buddha had preserved the teachings of the Pure Land in order to save beings that lived in this last age.

> "In the future, the Buddhist scriptures and teachings will perish, but, out of pity and compassion, I will especially preserve this sutra and maintain it in the world for a hundred years more. Those beings who encounter it will attain deliverance in accord with their aspirations" -*Sakyamuni*[34]

It is worth mentioning that originally the concept of the Degenerate Age of *Dharma* (or *Mappō*) was meant to encourage others to practice the *Dharma* and to seek awakening of the Buddha nature within oneself. This concept of the Age of the Last *Dharma* was of Indian origin and then was modified overtime through China, especially in periods of Buddhist persecution like in the sixth century.[35] The practices were seen as futile and pointless since man was so evil.[36]

To provide some perspective, there were different stages or ages leading to the Age of the Last *Dharma*. The first was the Age of Right *Dharma*, which took place right after *Sakyamuni*'s enlightenment. This was to last one thousand years and be a time of where both the teaching of the *Dharma* and practice could lead to enlightenment. After this age was another thousand year period called the Age of Semblance *Dharma*, where the teaching and practice were still maintained but did not lead to enlightenment. The finally would come the Age of the Last *Dharma* which would last ten thousand years. In this final age, there would be teaching, but no practice or enlightenment. In fact Shinran remarks about the teaching of the three ages of the *Dharma*. He found that from

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[34] Hisao Inagaki and Harold Stewart, *The Three Pure Land Sutras*. BDK English Tripitaka, 12-II, III, IV. (Berkeley, Calif: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2003), 312.

[35] Keel, *Understanding Shinran: A Dialogical Approach*. 19.

[36] Bloom, *Shinran's Gospel of Pure Grace*. 28.

calculations based on teachings that he was already six-hundred and seventy-three years into the last age.[37]

Due to Shinran's experience during the turmoil at the end of the Heian period of Japanese history and the beginning of the Kamakura period, and his own failure to free himself from the lusts he admits to being chained to, the teaching of the degenerate age takes form in Shinran's teaching.[38] Shinran was not completely original in ascribing the age he lived in as the Age of *Mappō*. His master and teacher, Hōnen, came to similar conclusions based on teachings from former Pure Land Masters including Tao-ch'o, who claimed that the Age of *Mappō* would be the age of the five defilements and which only the Pure Land teaching would lead to enlightenment.[39] For Hōnen, all people were blind and enslaved to their passions.[40] The Age of *Mappō* worked against anyone seeking to practice the *dharma*. Like Hōnen, Shinran was greatly aware of his shortcomings and even took the title "*Gutoku*," which means "foolish, bald-headed old man," to symbolize his recognition of his depravity.[41] To achieve any altruistic practice was impossible, because it was always done for selfish reasons. It always attempted with the ego in mind, therefore voiding any merit. In fact this futility of human effort was a logical conclusion

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[37] Shinran and Dennis Hirota. *The Collected Works of Shinran*. (Shin Buddhism translation series. Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwangji-ha, 1997) Vol. 1, VI #79.

[38] During the Heian period political conflicts and corruption in the Buddhist *sangha* was well known throughout this time.

[39] Keel, *Understanding Shinran: A Dialogical Approach*. 21.

[40] Paul Owens Ingram, *Pure Land Buddhism in Japan, A Study of the Doctrine of Faith in the Teachings of Hōnen and Shinran*. (Ann Arbor, Mich: University Microfilms, 1967), 83.

[41] Bloom, *Shinran's Gospel of Pure Grace*. 29.

for Shin Buddhism. If anyone seeking to achieve the state of no-self in a Buddhist equivalent of salvation, then how is that one can reach no-self through self. According the Shin school, Hongwanji, this would be "like trying to wash out mud by using muddy water."[42]

Shinran's experience practicing the *dharma* and his moral shortcomings and failures are inseparable from the development of his thought on the Age of *Mappō*. Shinran is so certain about his shortcomings that he makes the following statement,

> "I have no idea whether the nenbutsu is truly the seed for my being born in the Pure Land or whether it is the karmic act for which I must fall into hell. Should I have been deceived by Master Honen and, saying the nembutsu, were to fall into hell, even then I would have no regrets, The reason is, if I could attain Buddhahood by endeavoring in other practices, but said the nembutsu and so fell into hell, then I would feel regret for having been deceived. But I am incapable of any other practice, so hell is decidedly my abode whatever I do. "[43]

Shinran certain of his destiny in hell, gave up the difficult practices found in other forms of Buddhism which relied on the self. It was this decision that led him to sit under Hōnen's teaching of the *nembutsu*. The *nembutsu* was considered easy practice because it was intended to rely on "Other-Power." This would stand in contrast with difficult practice which was based on self-power. Only the outside power of *Amida* Buddha's could help a person to achieve Buddhahood, no acts resulting in either good or evil could make it more or less easier.[44]

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[42] *Jodo Shinshu: A Guide*. 71-72.

[43] Shinran and Dennis Hirota. "A Record in Lament on Divergences," *The Collected Works of Shinran*. (Shin Buddhism translation series. Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwangji-ha, 1997) Vol. 1, #23.

[44] Shinran and Dennis Hirota. *The Collected Works of Shinran*. (Shin Buddhism translation series. Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwangji-ha, 1997), Vol. 2, 179.

THE DEFILED WORLD

This world, characterized by its samsaric existence is known as a defiled world. It is the opposite of the Pure Land, although not its dualistic opposite, as Shin Buddhism holds a monistic view of reality. If the defiled world was considered to be full of suffering, attachments, and desires, then the Pure Land is a place of bliss and purity. This *saha* world is made of six realms; the realms of hellish existence, hungry ghosts, beasts, fighting demons, human beings, and heavenly beings. Based on ones *karma*, one would either ascend or descend on this scale of realms. These realms are as much of a physical location as they are a state of being. Each realm would constitute one's daily experience in life. During the Age of *Mappō* the immensity of suffering in the human realm increased due to the five defilements.[45] The five defilements made it impossible for any *Dharma* teaching to be put into practice.

It was the slogan of the Heian period made by Genshin, "reject the defiled world and seek the Pure Land."[46] This world is considered defiled because of the karmic evil in it. This includes sufferings, attachments, and the ego of self. Beings of this world lack a mind of purity and have many obstacles to keep them from seeing the truth of reality. Beings of this world include those who commit the five precepts.[47] However *Amida* Buddha, is still able to help even those who have committed the five precepts. All sentient beings lack sincerity. Sincerity was defined as those who "mock teachers and

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[45] The five defilements are defiled age, defiled view, defiled passion, defiled beings, and defiled life.

[46] Shinran and Dennis Hirota. *The Collected Works of Shinran*. (Shin Buddhism translation series. Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwangji-ha, 1997), Vol. 2, 176-177.

[47] Essentials of Faith Alone. The Five Precepts are killing living things, lying, stealing, adultery, and drinking alcohol.

elders, disrespect their parents, distrust their companions, and favor only evil."[48] For Shinran, these people had "hearts and tongues at odds."[49] Even those wishing to be born in the Pure Land were of impure mind since they wished to deceive and flatter others by claiming such an aspiration.[50] This world, *saha* which means endurance, beings experiencing great suffering and struggles gladly continue to do so due to a false sense of self-produced from attachment. Shinran found this world characterized by karmic evil which resulted in insincerity in word and deed. There was no one that was undefiled by *karma*. Any attempt at gain or control was in vain because of the transitory nature of this world. Beings were foolish believing themselves to be enduring. All sentient beings were in error due to belief in this falsity of self.

KARMIC EVIL

According to Shinran, evil is closely related to the ignorance and the blind passions of a being. Shinran described the world as an ocean of foolish beings suffering in karmic bondage. Shinran saw himself as a foolish being who has been wandering for countless eons without any chance for liberation.[51] For the foolish being, what is sought is always external in the world of attachment and desire. These attachments include

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[48] Shinran and Dennis Hirota. "Essentials of Faith Alone," *The Collected Works of Shinran*. Shin Buddhism translation series. (Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwangji-ha, 1997), 449-470.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Cited in Takamori, Kentetsu, Daiji Akehashi, and Kentaro Ito. *You Were Born for a Reason: The Real Purpose of Life*. (Los Angeles, Calif. [u.a.]: Ichimannendo, 2006), 139 on Kyōgyōshinshō chapter on faith.

material things, love, wealth, and fame. These things are illusory in Buddhism.[52] They do not truly exist and neither does the self they are intended to prop up. Shin Buddhists search for the truth of the self, which is ultimately no-self.[53] However the foolish being is self-centered and incapable of seeing the truth without any outside help. Shinran believed that to even realize oneself as a foolish being was the work of *Amida* Buddha.

Shinran used the metaphor of a burning house from the Lotus Sutra to explain his existence.[54] In the parable, the father begs his children to come out of the house that is one fire. However the children are caught up in their own games, too occupied to realize the reality around them. This represents the beings that are caught in the illusory world and seek after things that are but mere games. Evil is affirming the false reality, as with *karma* there is the creation of self. This evil at its very root is found in the samsaric existence.[55] For a being who had been trapped in the cycle of *samsara*, this karmic evil had made it impossible for anyone to break free. To be free from these passions was to be a Buddha. The term evil, although not unrelated to morality, has more to do with religious belief. Evil was the inability to successfully perform any teaching or practice."[56] Evil was the motivation of all actions, even actions that sought to put the *Dharma*

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[52] Utsuki, *The Shin Sect, A School of Mahāyāna Buddhism*. 14.

[53] Taitetsu Unno, *Shin Buddhism: Bits of Rubble Turn into Gold*. (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 90.

[54] Shinran and Dennis Hirota. "The True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way," *The Collected Works of Shinran*. (Shin Buddhism translation series. Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwangji-ha, 1997), Vol. 1, II: 76.

[55] Shinran and Dennis Hirota. *The Collected Works of Shinran*. (Shin Buddhism translation series. Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwangji-ha, 1997), 192.

[56] Ibid. 183-186.

teachings into practice. It was all done for self-gain. Ultimately evil was reliance on self-power.

To rely on self-power was to not rely on the outside help of *Amida* Buddha. This would be the opposite of the faith and entrusting that was sought by practitioners of Shin Buddhism. For sentient beings that are foolish and ignorant, to perform meditative practices and to cease thinking was impossible. Shinran quotes Shan Tao, that no matter if a being dedicate a lifetime to this practice, they would still not succeed and would be "like a person lacking transcendent powers building a house in the air."[57] Such an awareness of the evil of one's being was the work of the Other-Power. Shinran believed the very idea of his being aware of his own depravity and despair was only through the work of *Amida*. It is precisely when one becomes aware of the futility of self and their evil that one can turn to the Other-Power. When Shinran compared his deeds to that of *Amida*'s it was virtually impossible to do any good.[58] *Amida*'s goodness was incomparable and of absolute purity. Hence the more one saw their own depravity, the greater *Amida*'s nature would appear.[59]

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[57] Shinran and Dennis Hirota. "The True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way," *The Collected Works of Shinran*. (Shin Buddhism translation series. Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwangji-ha, 1997), Vol. 1, VI: 34.

[58] Alfred Bloom, "Shinran's Philosophy of Salvation" *Living in Amida's Universal Vow: Essays in Shin Buddhism*. (The Perennial philosophy series. Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2004), 123.

[59] Ibid. 125.

THE BIBLICAL DEFINITION OF HUMAN DEPRAVITY

The biblical concept of sin and evil differs greatly from the Shin doctrine of the Age of *Mappō*. Sin or *karma* in Shin is based on ignorance. This ignorance is based on a person believing that they, the self, are permanent and real. Sin, in the Christian sense of the term, does not deal with the Buddhist law of cause and effect found in *karma*, nor is it only ignorance of the true reality. Martin Luther had two understandings of sin. In one people commit sins out of ignorance and the other because of hardness of heart.[60] Sins of ignorance are sins omission.[61] This is when people are not aware as to what they should do. There are also sins of commission, which are committed with knowledge of them.[62] People may be totally aware of the truth of God's expectations, yet willfully violate those laws and morals. Sin is described as ignorance, error, and ultimately anything that is contrary to God's desire.[63] It is also characterized as "missing the mark," irreligion, transgression, lack of integrity, rebellion, treachery, perversion, and as an abomination.[64]

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[60] Martin Luther and William Hazlitt. *The Table-Talk of Martin Luther*. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2004), 91. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/luther/tabletalk.html>.

[61] Jas. 4:17; Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology: Volume Three : Sin, Salvation*. (Minneapolis, Minn: Bethany House, 2002), 101.

[62] 1 Jhn. 3:4; Ibid.

[63] Ignorance: Rom. 1:13; 2 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 1:22; Eph. 4:18; Error: Ezek. 34:6; Isa. 28:7; 1 Sam. 26:21.

[64] Adapted from Millard J. Erickson, "The Nature of Sin," *Christian Theology*. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Book House, 1983), 579-598. Note on irreligion; irreverence, the opposite of worship.

Evil exists from the Christian view because of human free will.[65] The choice of Adam to rebel against the commandment of God left all legacy of sin for all his descendants.[66] As Christians, human beings aren't sinners because we sin, but sin because we are sinners. People are born enslaved to the inherited sinful nature of Adam and Eve. Luther defines sin as, "a proneness towards evil, the loathing of the good, the distain for light and wisdom but fondness for error and darkness, the avoidance and contempt of good works but the eagerness to do evil."[67] Human nature outside of God's grace does not recognize him or give him glory.[68]

Sin in human nature is in direct relation to the concept of a broken personal relationship with God. Sin is a personal offense to God.[69] The original righteousness of Adam and Eve was based on a relational aspect with their creator.[70] This righteousness was founded in fact that human beings were originally created in the *imago dei*, the image of God.[71] Humans were created with the glory perfect knowledge of God.[72] This is

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[65] Geisler, *Systematic Theology: Volume Three : Sin, Salvation*. 86, 128.

[66] Rom. 5:12-14.

[67] Wilhelm Pauck (trans. And ed.), Luther: Lecture on Romans, (vol. XV of *the Library of Christian Classics*, eds. John Baillie, John T. McNeill, and Henry P. Van Dusen, 26 vols.; Philadelphia; Westminster Press, 1961), 167-168.

[68] Martin Luther, *Preface to the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans*. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1990s) 5. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/luther/prefacetoromans.html>.

[69] Num. 31:16; Ps. 51:4; Geisler, *Systematic Theology: Volume Three : Sin, Salvation*. 102.

[70] Alister E. McGrath, *Justification by Faith: What It Means for Us Today*. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Academie Books, 1988), 109.

[71] Gen. 1:26-27.

what Luther referred to as "passive righteousness."[73] Sin resulted in the dissolution of the relationship, because it broke away from the intended will and design of God.[74]

In both religions human futility is a core doctrine. In Christianity, human beings are hopeless in effort to reconcile themselves to a holy and righteous God, while in Shin beings are helpless in any effort to break the cycle of birth-and-death.[75] In Luther's doctrine of sola gratia, we can find parallels to the thought of Shinran. Both Luther and Shinran would hold that salvation is only possible with outside help, whether it be God or *Amida*. Luther believed that to be reconciled and love God was impossible until one placed their faith in Him, it was only then possible for God to set them free.[76] The first step for Luther was to realize that they were a sinner incapable of any good.[77] This faith for Luther and Shinran was a gift that was received, not an action of the individual or dependent in any way on human effort.[78]

> "Nevertheless, their common concern for salvation through grace alone and their common struggle against every form of self-salvation—as Buddhists say, the

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[72] Martin Luther cited in, Geisler, *Systematic Theology: Volume Three: Sin, Salvation.* 25.

[73] Robert Kolb, "Contemporary Lutheran Understandings of the Doctrine of Justification," Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier. *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates*. (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 162.

[74] Geisler, *Systematic Theology: Volume Three : Sin, Salvation*. 127.

[75] Isa. 1:4; Eph. 2:12.

[76] Pauck, Luther: Lecture on Romans. 218.

[77] Martin Luther and Theodore Graebner. *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1939), 39. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/luther/galatians.pdf>.

[78] Luther, *Preface to the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans*. 4; Ingram, *"Shinran Shonin and Martin Luther: A Soteriological Comparison."* 446.

> opposition of *tariki* [self-power] and *jiriki* [other-power]—binds these men together over and beyond all limitations of time and space."[79]

This argument would be none other than grace monism. This is ridiculous considering the ultimate goal of Shin is a state of no-self and Christianity is an affirmation of a self in a relationship reconciled to God. There may be elements of denying self in both religions, but what is meant by self is essentially different. In Shin the self is lost in the ontological union with the Tathāgata, while in Christianity the self is merely the will surrendering in obedience to God.[80] Even many Shin Buddhists would find the idea of grace monism repulsive, because they believe such parallels are imaginary.[81]

Human beings are responsible for their sins, not because of the age they live in, but by their own volition. People are responsible for their actions, "But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death."[82] A key difference between the two religions would be that in Christianity "the wages of sin is death," while in Shin it leads to perpetual life in the *saha* world.[83] All human beings are subject to the corruption of the Fall.[84] In Christianity, punishment is required of sins against God. To be redeemed, God in Christ Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice for the

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[79] Buri, *"The Concept of Grace in Paul, Shinran, and Luther."* 31.

[80] Luke 9:23; Eph. 4:22-24.

[81] Ingram, *"Shinran Shonin and Martin Luther: A Soteriological Comparison."* 430.

[82] Jas. 1:14-15. ESV.

[83] Utsuki, *The Shin Sect, A School of Mahāyāna Buddhism*. 15.

[84] Ps. 14:1-3; Eccles. 7:20; Rom. 3:23.

their inability to practice the teachings of the Buddha. They are prevented from doing so by the degenerate world."[90]

[90] Colin Noble, *"Portraying Christian Grace: A Response to the Doctrine of Grace in Shin Buddhism." Asia Journal of Theology* 11, no. 1 (April 1997), 62.

CHAPTER II- THE PURPOSE OF GRACE

Self-power versus other-power is the core similarity between Christianity and Shin Buddhism. In Shin Buddhism, one realizes the futility of their efforts in reaching enlightenment and there upon relies on *Amida* Buddha for his merit to reach the Pure Land and obtain *nirvana*. In Christianity, the sinner under conviction of the Holy Spirit of God realizes their own sinfulness and inability to restore the relationship between God and themselves. Instead they rely upon Christ Jesus who acts as a mediator and as a sin offering for reconciliation with God. This shift from self-power to other-power was absolutely crucial to Shinran's thought much as to the same extent with Martin Luther. However these two forms of grace differ greatly in addressing the human predicament and in their purposes.

Shinran had come to the realization through his own efforts at practice that he was unable to contribute anything to freeing himself from his cyclical existence of suffering. Salvation was an unconditional offering from *Amida* Buddha who desires to save all sentient beings. In Shin thought, no being is worthy of the grace and merit that one receives from *Amida* Buddha. This grace is given to all beings regardless of the current status as being either good or evil. All beings when compared to that of *Amida* Buddha pale in comparison and are foolish beings. All beings suffer in from the five defilements of this world. For many years the Bodhisattva *Dharmakara* had practiced, gaining merit. Whenever someone entrusts themselves to *Amida* Buddha, it "immediately eradicates the grave karmic evil that will bind one to eighty billion kalpas of birth-and-death."[91] This

[91] Shinran, and Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki. *The Kyogyoshinsho: The Collected Passages Expounding the True Teaching, Living, Faith, and Realizing of the Pure Land. (Translated by Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki*. Kyoto: Shinshu Otaniha, 1973), II: 28.

merit breaks the cycle of their samsaric existence, ending the cycle of death and rebirth. Upon death they will reach the Pure Land. There is simply nothing else a person much do other than entrust themselves to *Amida* Buddha's grace.

> "Further, Amida Buddha embraces us from outside, using the light that "takes us in, never to abandon." Light is the expression of the Buddha-mind and is the form of higher wisdom and the activity of compassion. Our hearts and minds are brutalized by our efforts to get by in everyday life; our awareness of the Truth is obstructed by our ignorance and base passion. Therefore, we cannot see the figure of Amida Buddha, yet we are always enveloped by the light of Great Compassion and protected by it."[92]

This light exposes the person to the futility of self-power and to the Other-Power who is none other than *Amida* Buddha. Shin Buddhism in Christian terms could be considered a form of monergism.[93] To surrender to the Other-Power is to give up all form of self-calculation or *hakarai*. *Hakarai* is a term commonly used by Shinran to refer to self-power used to benefit oneself. All *hakarai* is done for the ego self. Salvation from *Amida* comes when all hope of self-preservation is lost. It is only then that the will becomes aware of its own hopelessness and is open to *Amida*'s grace. It is ironic however that ultimately this self-power and Other-Power contrast is not dualistic. This is because ultimately the true self is the Other-Power.[94] However from Shinran's religious view it is

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[92] *Jodo Shinshu: A Guide*. 73.

[93] D.T. Suzuki. "Shin Buddhism," Edited by Bloom, Alfred. *Living in Amida's Universal Vow: Essays in Shin Buddhism*. (The Perennial philosophy series. Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2004), 42.

[94] Taitetsu Unno, *River of Fire, River of Water: An Introduction to the Pure Land Tradition of Shin Buddhism*. (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 36-41.

somewhat paradoxical. The process of realizing one's Buddha –nature was for Shinran becoming aware of one's evil nature.[95]

THE EIGHTEENTH VOW

Grace in Shin Buddhism takes form in the forty-eight vows that the Bodhisattva *Dharmakara* had made before becoming the *Amida* Buddha. However one vow in particular stands out. This vow is the eighteenth vow found in the Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life. It is also commonly referred to as the Primal Vow. It is considered the most important vow by Shinran.

> "If, when I attain Buddhahood, the sentient beings of the ten quarters, with sincere mind entrusting themselves, aspiring to be born in my land, and saying my Name perhaps even ten times, should not be born there, may I not attain enlightenment. Excluded are those who commit the five grave offenses and those who slander the right dharma."[96]

Dharmakara worked countless eons in order to fulfill this vow. Upon fulfillment *Dharmakara* became *Amida* Buddha. The title primal, refers to eternal never beginning vow. It has been the desire of the *Tathagata* always. All sentient beings are taken into account within the Vow. This vow takes form in the Name of *Amida* Buddha. In the Tannisho it mentions that Shinran expressed that he did not know the height of the Tathgata's benevolence.[97] The Primal Vow is great compassion of *Tathagata*.

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[95] Alfred Bloom, "Shinran's Philosophy of Salvation," *Living in Amida's Universal Vow: Essays in Shin Buddhism*. (The Perennial philosophy series. Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2004), 130.

[96] Shinran and Dennis Hirota. "A Record in Lament of Divergences," in *The Collected Works of Shinran*. (Shin Buddhism translation series. Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwangji-ha, 1997), Vol. 1, II: 82.

[97] Ibid. Epilogue.

The Primal Vow is the Vow of the *Tathagata* or Buddha. It is also called the "Primal Vow of Merit Transference Buddha Centered Power" or "Primal Vow of Absolute Buddha-centered Power."[98]An individual hears the Vow which produces faith in the believer. This vow is the action of the *Dharma*-body-as-suchness, which is manifested in the *Dharma*-body-as-compassionate.[99] This manifestation finds itself as *Dharmakara*'s eighteenth vow. When someone recites the *nembutsu* it is the fulfillment of the Primal Vow. Shinran compared the Primal Vow to that of an ocean of compassion, having "all-embracing openness, fathomless depth, and miraculous power to transform everything and make it a part of itself."[100] This is contrasted with the ocean of human suffering, birth-and-death, deluded passion, and karmic bondage.[101]

THE NEMBUTSU

The *nembutsu* refers to the phrase "*namo amida butsu*," which translated means "I take refuge in *Amida* Buddha." *Namo* means to entrust and *amida butsu* refers to *Amida* Buddha. While *namo* means to entrust, this entrusting does not originate from the person. This has already been accomplished by *Amida* Buddha through the Vow. Shinran had

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[98] *Jodo Shinshu: A Guide*. 73.

[99] Shinran believe the *dharma*-body had two parts, the *dharma*-body-as-suchness without form and the *dharma*-body-as-compassionate which took form in the Vow. These are two phases of Oneness. They have also been referred to as the Ultimate Law-body and the Accommodated Law-Body. See Utsuki, *The Shin Sect, A School of Mahāyāna Buddhism*. 8-9.

[100] Unno, *River of Fire, River of Water: An Introduction to the Pure Land Tradition of Shin Buddhism*. 112.

[101] Ibid. 113.

come to believe that *namo* meant *Amida* calling out to us before placing our faith in him. To recite the *nembutsu* was to express absolute dependence on *Amida* Buddha.[102] The *nembutsu* is the Primal Vow manifesting itself. Hōnen had emphasized repeating the *nembutsu* as a practice for gaining merit. However Shinran criticized this view of using the *nembutsu* for gaining merit.[103] Faith was the key in reciting the *nembutsu*. This is why in Shinran's work, the *Kyōgyōshinshō* or the True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way, includes the eighteenth vow under the chapter on faith, rather than under practice.[104] Faith was so important to the *nembutsu*, that one could not actually recite the *nembutsu* genuinely without having faith.[105] Shinran states that the reason for stating the *nembutsu* once or even multiple times is because one was to hear the *nembutsu* as the Primal Vow in faith of *Amida*'s calling out to the person.[106] Any compassion on the *Amida* Buddha's part is traced back to the Primal Vow. Surprisingly reciting the *nembutsu* is, while being an act of faith in the Other-Power, it is also a statement about the nature of reality itself.[107] In the Sanskrit origins of *Amida*, the name can mean either

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[102] Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *"Development of the Pure Land Doctrine in Buddhism." The Eastern Buddhist* 3, no. 4 (January-March 1925), 291.

[103] Alfred Bloom, "Shinran's Philosophy of Salvation," *Living in Amida's Universal Vow: Essays in Shin Buddhism*. (The Perennial philosophy series. Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2004), 124.

[104] Keel, *Understanding Shinran: A Dialogical Approach*. 82.

[105] Ibid. 81.

[106] Shinran, and Dennis Hirota. "Lamp for the Latter Ages," in *The Collected Works of Shinran*. (Shin Buddhism translation series. Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwangji-ha, 1997), #11.

[107] Unno, *River of Fire, River of Water: An Introduction to the Pure Land Tradition of Shin Buddhism*. 27.

immeasurable or infinite light. This infinite light is the *Tathagata* and *Dharma*-body itself. To state that one takes refuge in the *Amida* Buddha is to state that one ultimately takes refuge in the ultimate reality. This is what is meant by being born in the Pure Land.[108] This belief resulted in two actions forming *shinjin*; an awareness of imperfection and an awareness of *Amida*'s infinite compassion.[109]

SHINJIN

Shinjin is the entrusting which is the inner working of *Amida* according to Shinran. It is impossible as foolish beings to have a sincere mind of faith. *Amida* Buddha gives beings a sincere mind which at the same time is against the egotistic thinking of being able to save oneself. *Shinjin* is the combination of two terms. *Shin* means be to "true, real, or sincere." *Jin* is derived from *jinen* or *jinen honi*. *Ji* means "of itself" and *nen* means to "to be made to become so" and *honi* refers to the working of the Vow. *Jinen honi* means, "one is made to become so through the working of the Vow of *Tathāgata*." *Jinen honi* is the working of *Amida* Buddha according to the Vow in the effort to liberate all sentient beings. "In other words, *jinen* refers to ultimate reality itself as well as the way in which this reality works for our salvation, i.e., enlightenment."[110] *Jinen* is that which is beyond the individual's calculation. This calculation or *hakarai* is

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[108] Yoshifumi Ueda, *The Mahayana Structure of Shinran's Thought: II.* (*Translated by Dennis Hirota*. 1984), 130.

[109] Alfred Bloom, "Shinran's Way in the Modern World," *Living in Amida's Universal Vow: Essays in Shin Buddhism*. (The Perennial philosophy series. Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2004), 91.

[110] Keel, *Understanding Shinran: A Dialogical Approach*. 130.

based on self-power. *Jinen* has be translated to mean a number of things including the working of the Primal Vow. *Jinen* is the Other-Power of *Amida* Buddha at work. When *Amida* calls out to individuals they are to entrust without any doubt or double-mindedness in the Primal Vow.[111] This calling out occurs from *Amida* and not within the person, so that it would not be any exertion of self-power, but instead a relinquishing of it.[112]

While *shinjin* has been commonly translated as faith, many Shin Buddhists would consider this a mistranslation. To choose the word faith would to adopt western meaning that would distort the true meaning.[113] *Shinjin* is to realize and have an understanding or trusting mind.[114] It should be noted that *shinjin* does not lead to salvation for the Shin Buddhist. Instead *shinjin* is salvation. It is to be freed and liberated from the notion of self-power. "In other words, Other Power is the Buddha's power that has become one's own as *shinjin*."[115] Merely obtaining *shinjin* is not salvation at the immediate moment. *Shinjin* places one in the stage of the "truly settled" or of nonretrogression. Once the stage of nonretrogression is obtained then salvation is insured at the moment of death.

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[111] Shinran and Dennis Hirota. "Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls," in *The Collected Works of Shinran*. (Shin Buddhism translation series. Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwangji-ha, 1997), 493-494.

[112] Ibid.

[113] *Jodo Shinshu: A Guide*. 76.

[114] Lefebure, *The Buddha and the Christ: Explorations in Buddhist and Christian Dialogue*. 111.

[115] Shinran and Dennis Hirota. *The Collected Works of Shinran*. (Shin Buddhism translation series. Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwangji-ha, 1997), 206-207.

For Shinran the Buddhist law of *karma*, cause and effect, cannot be removed during a person's life, rather they must wait until death when the karmic body dissolves.

Shinjin is the opposite of being a foolish being. A foolish being is empty and transitory, while *shinjin* is sincere and true. (Notes on Essentials of Faith Alone) Sincere is the opposite of empty and true the opposite of transitory. *Shinjin* is the threefold mind mentioned in the Larger Sutra of Immeasurable Life; sincere mind, entrusting with joy, and aspiring to be born in the Pure Land. *Shinjin* is closely united with the Vow and the *nembutsu*. All three concepts are intertwined. As mentioned earlier it is impossible to recite the *nembutsu* genuinely without the mind of faith (*shinjin*). Since the *nembutsu* is the Vow working in the individual giving *shinjin* to the individual, both *shinjin* and the *nembutsu* is considered one practice by Shinran.[116] The mind of *Amida* is bestowed at the moment of *Shinjin*.[117] This entrusting comes from the "power of the merit transference of the Primal Vow."[118] *Amida* does not promise that he will liberate if someone entrusts themselves to him, this would be to misunderstand the depravity of the individual and of *Amida*'s Vow. Instead what is meant is that they can be assured of his promise of liberation.[119]

Finally, *shinjin* is realized instantly in one thought moment. This for Shinran is the moment of entrusting and entering of the stage of nonretrogression. This moment is

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[116] Shinran and Yoshifumi Ueda, *Letters of Shinran: A Translation of Mattōshō*. (Shin Buddhism translation series, 1. Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1978), 63.

[117] Ueda, *The Mahayana Structure of Shinran's Thought: I.* 70.

[118] *Jodo Shinshu: A Guide*. 78.

[119] Ibid. 79.

simultaneously the same moment that one recites the *nembutsu* with sincerity. This moment is the working of *Amida* Buddha and "being grasped, never to be abandoned."[120] Shinran believed that to enter the stage of the truly settled is the settling of faith. There is no certainty of salvation outside the settling of faith. As soon as one has realized *shinjin*, their faith and salvation are secure. Shinran equated Buddha-nature and the *Tathagata* to *shinjin*.[121] This also means that *shinjin* is the full realization of *nirvana*.[122] *Tathagata* is the supreme reality of *nirvana* and the *dharma*-body. The *Tathagata* is also Buddha-nature, which is enlightenment for sentient beings. The moment of realization is the promise of attaining Buddhahood upon death.

SIMUL JUSTUS ET PECCATOR

Martin Luther's doctrine of justification allowed for a sinner to be declared righteous while at the same time remaining a sinner. Believers remain sinners in this life, but are always penitent and therefore justified.[123] It was only after being resurrected and give new bodies that sin would no longer reign in human beings.[124] Christ's followers

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[120] Shinran and Dennis Hirota. "Notes on the Inscriptions on Sacred Scrolls," in *The Collected Works of Shinran*. (Shin Buddhism translation series. Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwangji-ha, 1997), 504.

[121] Shinran and Dennis Hirota. "The True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way," in *The Collected Works of Shinran*. (Shin Buddhism translation series. Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwangji-ha, 1997), III: 31. The six paramitas are charity, ethics, patience, effort, concentration, and higher wisdom.

[122] *Jodo Shinshu: A Guide*. 77.

[123] *Semper peccator, semper penitens, semper iustus*; see McGrath, Alister E. *Iustitia Dei A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*. (Cambridge, U.K.: de

[124] 1 Cor. 15.

would be made in his likeness. This doctrine can be summed up in the phrase *simul justus et peccator* or both sinner and justified.[125] Because of Christ Jesus' sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins, the sinner is reconciled to God and is no longer condemned. Christ's act is credited to us by our faith in him. Shinran held a similar doctrine of *Amida* Buddha's work in the individual's life.

For Shin Buddhists, to be "justified" is to realize the Buddha-nature within themselves, which is only accomplished through the help of Other-Power. The closest concept in Christianity would be the *imago dei*.[126] However, the *imago dei* was lost or at least severely damaged in the Fall. It is not possible for human beings to realize the *imago dei* as a means of being restored to God. Even if a person realized the *imago dei*, it would not lead to the forgiveness of sins. However the promise of birth in the Pure Land can be equated Luther's thoughts on salvation.

> "Now can we say that he is perfectly righteous? No. But he is at the same time both a sinner and righteous (*simul justus et peccator*), a sinner in fact, but righteous by virtue of the reckoning and the certain promise of God that he will redeem him from sin in order, in the end, to make him perfectly whole and sound."[127]

While Shinran believed that one could have *shinjin* and thus have their birth in the Pure Land certain, they still were burdened by their karmic existence until death. This is because of the karmic law of cause and effect. While the person may continue to earn

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[125] Robert Kolb, "Contemporary Lutheran Understandings of the Doctrine of Justification," Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier. *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates*. (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 172.

[126] Paul S. Chung, *"Martin Luther and Shinran: The Presence of Christ in Justification and Salvation in a Buddhist-Christian Context". Asia Journal of Theology*. 18, no. 2(2004), 306.

[127] Pauck, Luther: Lecture on Romans. 127.

negative merit in this life, it has no bearing after death since the karmic body dissolves. The Buddha does not interfere in this life to prevent the suffering of the individual from taking place. Buddhism allows no room for petitionary prayer or bettering of this world.[128] What is deserved to being from eons of karmic bondage is dealt by the cycle of birth-and-death. For *simul justus et peccator*, the similarity is the difference.[129] It is not found in the in being justified to a righteous God, but yet in the contrast of having the promise of salvation ensured and remaining subject to evil in this life.

JUSTIFICATION VERSUS MERIT TRANSFER

Shinran believed that individuals on their own efforts could never attain merit towards their release from the cycle of *samsara*. Instead he believed that the only way this could be achieved is by the help of *Amida* Buddha bestowing merit from countless eons of work as the Bodhisattva *Dharmakara*. This transference of merit happened at the moment of *shinjin*. This merit frees the individual from karmic bondage that has accrued upon the time of death, although it is assured in this life. Then upon death *nirvana* is realized. The purpose of *Amida*'s grace is only fulfilled upon death, all one has in this world is the promise of salvation. In Christianity, when God declares the individual to be righteous, the right relationship with God is restored.[130] Although the consummation and complete fulfillment of salvation is after the resurrection and the person still experiences

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[128] Buri, *"The Concept of Grace in Paul, Shinran, and Luther."* 42

[129] Chung, *"Martin Luther and Shinran: The Presence of Christ in Justification and Salvation in a Buddhist-Christian Context".* 306.

[130] Rom. 5:1-2.

the effects of sin and evil in this world, the believer immediately experiences they main purpose of grace.[131] A person experiences restored relations of the original created righteousness with God at the point of conversion, this is not something that begins in the future.[132]

In Shin Buddhism, there is no justification, because there is no God who acts as judge.[133] *Amida* Buddha does not stand to judge the individual; he only is acting out the *Dharma*-body-as-compassionate to fulfill the Primal Vow. While God loves and desires to redeem individuals through Christ Jesus, he also acts as judge.[134] God is under obligation by his own nature to punish sin, but the satisfaction of the punishment is provided by him.[135] On the Day of Judgment, God will judge all people based on their actions in this life to either everlasting life or to condemnation in Hell.[136] God fulfills two roles in Christianity, savior and judge. Shin Buddhism is not theistic, and there are no sins in any Christian meaning of the term. *Amida* bestows merit and eliminates karmic debt that has enslaved beings to the cycle of birth-and-death. No amount of good works, such as those of *Amida*, could ever cover the sin debt of human beings against a righteous

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[131] Phil 3:20-21;

[132] Robert Kolb, "Contemporary Lutheran Understandings of the Doctrine of Justification," Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier. *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates*. (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 165.

[133] Noble, *"Portraying Christian Grace: A Response to the Doctrine of Grace in Shin Buddhism."* 62.

[134] John 3:16-17; Rom. 3:26; 2 Tim. 4:1.

[135] McGrath, *Iustitia Dei A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*. 274.

[136] Matt 25:31-46.

and holy God. God's offering of himself as Christ Jesus pays the debt of sin.[137] Christian salvation, everlasting life and fellowship with God were never rewarded by merit.[138]

In the Christian worldview, good deeds do not make up for evil ones.[139] Evil must be accounted for and judged accordingly to God's nature and justice. Sin is an offense to a personal God. Evil in Shin Buddhism does not demand justice, but is merely is karmic existence. For justice to be carried out in the Christian sense of the term would be nothing other than the perpetuating of *samsara* for Shin. Therefore for Buddhists, the sacrificial death of Christ Jesus for the atonement of sins could never mean salvation. In Shin, the cost ridding of evil is merely the practice of the *Dharma* by the Bodhisattva *Dharmakara*. The cost in Christianity however, is a crucified Lord. Christ was wounded and crushed for our sins, so that we might be reconciled and at peace with God.[140] Christ acted and suffered on humankind's behalf. This substitutionary atonement meant that he took upon himself the punishment that was meant for humans.[141] It is because of this act that God can declare us righteous and reconciled to him.

Christ's righteousness is imputed to believers, while Christ bore the sins of man[142]. Specifically Christ bore the punishment that is deserved of sinners, and became

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[137] Rom. 5:6-11.

[138] Gal. 2:16; Luther and Graebner. *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*. 39.

[139] Gal. 2:16.

[140] Isa. 53:5.

[141] 1 Pet. 2:24; Erickson, *Christian Theology*. 830-832.

[142] Ibid. 969.

sin for them.[143] At the same time Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believer, so that they have the righteousness of God in Christ.[144] Righteousness only comes through the believer being in Christ.[145] The believer is seen as crucified and resurrected with Christ.[146] This union with Christ is crucial to understanding justification. It is through this union with Christ that we receive his righteousness and are restored as children of God.[147] Luther also saw this imputation of righteousness being more than justification as the believer is not yet fully righteous. This imputation continued to treat the sinner until they are fully healed.[148] This "alien righteousness" is instilled more and more as the believer matures in their faith and has its total fulfillment upon death.[149] Shinran believed in several benefits of *Amida* in this life, one of which was their karmic evil would be turned into good.[150] This would at first glance appear somewhat similar to the imputation of righteousness. However this as mentioned before, does not mean that the Buddha prevents suffering or evil from occurring. Instead this good is one realizing the nature of *samsara* and the effects of *karma*.

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[143] 1 Cor. 5:21

[144] Isa. 53:11; Rom. 5:18; 1 Cor. 5:21.

[145] John 15:1-17

[146] Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:5-7.

[147] Gal. 3:26-27.

[148] Cited in Mark A. Seifrid, "Luther, Melanchthon and Paul on the Question of Imputation," Mark Husbands, and Daniel J. Treier. *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates*. (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 145.

[149] McGrath, *Iustitia Dei A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*. 227.

[150] *Jodo Shinshu: A Guide*. 85.

CHAPTER III- THE SOURCE OF GRACE

Since it has been argued that the grace is the same between the two religions, it should not be surprising that likewise a claim of similar functions of the salvific figures is made. Both of the mediators supposedly assist the hopeless individual by bestowing unmerited grace and assistance to achieve salvation. Little concern is given to the origins, function, or deity of the figures. Both could be claimed to help the individual to have union with the ultimate, regardless of what the ultimate means. An in-depth look into the qualities and aspects of each mediator is needed in order to even grasp what is meant by salvation.

A MAN BECOMES A MEDIATOR

Shin Buddhists hold *Amida* Buddha as their mediator or even savior. Since Shin Buddhism is nontheistic, *Amida* Buddha is not to be considered a god or creator.[151] *Amida* Buddha was once a man named *Dharmakara*.[152] We learn from *Sakyamuni* Buddha about *Dharmakara* from the Sutra of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life. According to Shin, the Pure Land Sutras contain *Sakyamuni*'s true teaching. This was because in the future, *Sakyamuni* knew of the coming Age of *Mappō*. He knew that no teaching or practice would survive the Age, so he promised to preserve the Sutras for a while longer.[153] For Shinran the Larger Sutra was of primary importance.

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[151] Utsuki, *The Shin Sect, A School of Mahāyāna Buddhism*. 7-8.

[152] Or Hōzō in Japanese.

[153] Inagaki and Stewart, *The Three Pure Land Sutras*. BDK English Tripitaka, 12-II, III, IV. 312.

> "To reveal the true teaching: It is the Larger Sutra of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life. The central purport of this sutra is that Amida, by establishing the incomparable Vows, has opened wide the dharma-storehouse, and full of compassion for small, foolish beings, selects and bestows the treasure of virtues."[154]

Dharmakara was a king who had listened to the Buddha's teaching. After hearing of the teaching, a desire for enlightenment seized him. He left his throne and became a monk by the named *Dharmakara* or "Treasury of *Dharma*." *Dharmakara* inquired of the Buddha Lokesvararaja on how to attain enlightenment. The Buddha taught him of the many Buddha lands. After contemplating for "five kalpas," he made made his forty-eight bodhisattva vows, of which the eighteenth or Primal Vow has been mentioned. These forty-eight vows found in the Larger Sutra on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life. *Dharmakara*'s enlightenment was made conditional that they vows must be fulfilled. He spent countless eons in practice without any greed, pride, or falsity. He gained an immeasurable about of merit. In his vows he promised to create a Pure Land, where one was quickly able to attain *nirvana*. Upon fulfilling the vows he became the *Amida* Buddha.

A MANIFESTATION OF THE DHARMA-BODY

It is questionable as to whether it is of any importance whether or not *Dharmakara* is a real historical figure in the minds of Shin Buddhists.[155] There is little

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[154] Shinran and Dennis Hirota. "The True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way," in *The Collected Works of Shinran*. (Shin Buddhism translation series. Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwangji-ha, 1997), Vol. 1, I: 2.

[155] Ryojin Soga, "The Significance of Dharmakara Bodhisattva as Earthly Savior," Alfred Bloom, *Living in Amida's Universal Vow: Essays in Shin Buddhism*. (The Perennial philosophy series. Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2004), 156-157.

concern as to whether he is real or only a skillful means of expressing the *dharma*-body as compassionate. What is of ultimate importance for Shin Buddhists is the latter. Whether or not *Dharmakara* was an historical figure, for Shin he remains an expression of the compassion of the *Dharma*-body. Ultimately the *dharma*-body has no form, it is suchness. It is incomprehensible and unexplainable. However Shinran in his doctrine conceived of the *dharma*-body having two parts, distinct but inseparable; the *dharma*-body-as-suchness which is without form and the *dharma*-body-as-compassionate which has form.[156] Since the *dharma*-body is formless, it never fails to take every kind of form, and has the features of the Buddha.[157] For the *dharma*-body to have form would seem as a contradiction, however Shinran allowed for what was an intermediary stage between formless and form called formless forms or "wondrous beings."[158]

The *dharma*-body-as-compassionate takes form in the *Amida* Buddha and he Pure Land. All of these forms are ultimately representative of the ultimate reality of the *dharma*-body-as-suchness.[159] *Amida* in Sanskrit means "un measure" or un-measurable. *Amida* Buddha is the immeasurable Buddha.[160] Light and life are the immeasurable quantities of *Amida* Buddha. Therefore *Amida* is commonly referred to as both *Amitabha*, the Buddha of Immeasurable Life and *Amitayus*, the Buddha of Immeasurable Light.

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[156] Keel, *Understanding Shinran: A Dialogical Approach*. 158.

[157] Shinran and Dennis Hirota. "The True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way," in *The Collected Works of Shinran*. (Shin Buddhism translation series. Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwangji-ha, 1997), Vol. 1, IV: 17.

[158] Keel, *Understanding Shinran: A Dialogical Approach*. 158.

[159] Ibid. 165.

[160] Utsuki, *The Shin Sect, A School of Mahāyāna Buddhism* 7.

> "The Buddha's nondiscriminating, unobstructed, and nonexclusive guidance of all sentient beings is likened to the all-embracing waters of the great ocean. From this treasure ocean of oneness, form was manifested, taking the name of Bodhisattva Dharmakara, who, through establishing the unhindered Vow as the cause, became Amida Buddha. For this reason, Amida is the Tathagata of fulfilled body. Amida has been called "Buddha of unhindered light filling the ten quarters."[161]

Importantly these aspects and qualities of *Amida* are referred to in the forty-eight vows that are made by the Bodhisattva *Dharmakara*. The bodhisattva vows upon being fulfilled lead to a "fulfilled body" in which the vows make up the characteristics of the Buddha. For instance having the quality of light would be the twelfth vow found in the Larger Sutra on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life. This light is seen as a light not in the way ordinary light is hindered, but as a light that pierces all of existence. For Shin, there is nowhere this light is not. All sentient beings are within the bounds of *Amida*'s boundless compassion. Shinran used the symbol of light to refer to the nature of formless forms. This is because light cannot be measured and is immaterial. *Amida* Buddha is able to go to any of the ten quarters and work towards saving all beings. The thirteenth, *Dharmakara* vows to have infinite life if he is to attain Buddhahood giving the name Amitabha.

THE NAME

The seventeenth vow is of extreme importance in Shin Buddhism. In this vow, the Bodhisattva declares that his name should be proclaimed throughout all the ten quarters.

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[161] Shinran and Dennis Hirota. "Notes on Once-calling and Many-Calling," in *The Collected Works of Shinran*. (Shin Buddhism translation series. Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwangji-ha, 1997), Vol. 1, 486.

"If, after my obtaining Buddhahood, all the immeasurable Buddhas in the ten quarters do not approvingly proclaim my name, may I not attain the Highest Enlightenment."[162] It is this way that *Amida* makes himself identifiable and meaningful in the *saha* world.[163] His name then can enter and interact with beings caught in their samsaric existence. The importance of this can be seen every time the *nembutsu* is repeated, "I take refuge in the *Amida* Buddha."

THE PRIMAL VOW

For Shinran, the Vow is the inconceivable ship of *Amida* that carries one across the sea, from the shore of *samsara* to that of *nirvana*.[164] This is the Vow that is without origination. It has always been the desire of the *Tathagata* to save all sentient beings. The *Tathagata* is the form that the *dharma*-body-as-compassionate takes. The Vow, *Amida*, and *Tathagata* are all different ways of describing and referring to the true reality. Any form taken is a compassionate means.

> "This Vow is the Vow to make us all attain the supreme Buddhahood. The supreme Buddha is formless, and because of being formless is called *jinen*. When this Buddha is shown as being with form, it is not called the supreme *nirvana* (Buddha). In order to make us realize that the true Buddha is formless, it is expressly called Amida Buddha; so I have been taught. Amida Buddha is the medium through which we are made to realize *jinen*."[165].

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[162] Cited in Bloom, *Shinran's Gospel of Pure Grace*. 3.

[163] Ueda, Shinran, and Hirota, *Shinran: An Introduction to His Thought*. 118.

[164] Shinran and Dennis Hirota. "The True Teaching, Practice and Realization of the Pure Land Way," in *The Collected Works of Shinran*. (Shin Buddhism translation series. Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwangji-ha, 1997), Vol. 1, "Preface."

[165] Shinran and Ueda. *Letters of Shinran: A Translation of Mattōshō*. 29-30.

It is because *Amida* is the formless form that he is able to act as a mediator between the two shores. Ultimately *Amida*, *Sakyamuni*, *Dharmakara* are all manifestations of the ultimate reality. For Shinran, all these figures could not have known about the Vow without coming from the same reality that it had originated.[166] Therefore logically *Amida* was before even *Dharmakara* the Bodhisattva who became *Amida*. It would seem unreasonable for *Amida* to take form in *Dharmakara*. However, as Keel argues, it was necessary for the formless to take upon formless forms in order to reach the world of forms.[167] D.T. Suzuki summarized the Primal Vow as this, "*Amida* wants to save all beings without exception."[168]

CHRIST AND AMIDA

Christ Jesus when compared to *Amida* Buddha is of different origin and by being deity. While *Amida* is the formless form of the *dharma*-body-as-suchness, Christ Jesus is the incarnation of God in the flesh and the second member of the Trinity.[169] Both are manifestations of the ultimate uncreated reality. However, one is theistic and the other is nontheistic. Christ Jesus is the fullness of God, the Son of God, and one with the Father.[170] Christ takes a form that is the same form as all other human beings in this reality. Shin Buddhism sees these forms as evil and desires to rid existence of form.

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[166] Keel, *Understanding Shinran: A Dialogical Approach*. 173.

[167] Ibid. 174.

[168] Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki and Taitetsu Unno. *Buddha of Infinite Light*. (Boston: Shambhala Publications in association with the American Buddhist Academy, 1997), 27.

[169] John 1:1, 1:14; Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:8.

[170] John 10:30.

Amida Buddha is a formless form in stage that is comprehendible to forms of this world. Christ commits not evil by taking on form. This is a sharp distinction that one would embrace forms to save all those who believe, while the other would only meet half way because such forms would lead to a logical contradiction of purpose. Jesus was in every way human and yet did not sin or commit evil.[171] Such an action of God's behalf shows that the created order is not intrinsically evil as in the *saha* world, but instead is good.[172]

It should be obvious that Christ and *Amida* Buddha are very different as to origin and purpose. Still, Buddhism being nontheistic, there have been claims of similarities of office. For instance, D.T. Suzuki states that *Amida* and Christ have a similar function.

> "In Shin, Amida performs in a sense the office of God and also that of Christ. Amida with Amidists is Light (*ābha*) and Life (*āyus*) and Love (*karunā*), and from his Love and Life issue his vows, and it is through these vows that Amida is connected with us. The Vow is mediator, and as it emanates from Amida's Love, it is just as efficient as Christ in its office of mediatorship."[173]

Amida is the Light, Life, and Love of the Primal Vow expressed. There is some comparison here that is worth mentioning. Christ mentions that he is "the way, and the truth, and the life."[174] Christ is also the "light of the world."[175] Some of their described attributes appear similar.

In Christianity, light refers to being the truth of revealing God's revelation to man. Christ Jesus came to the world to reveal the Father's will of re-establishing peace

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[171] 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15, 7:26; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5.

[172] Erickson, *Christian Theology*. 738.

[173] Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Collected Writings on Shin Buddhism*. (Kyoto: Shinshū Ōtaniha, 1973), 20.

[174] Jn. 14:6. ESV.

[175] Jn. 8:12. ESV.

between man and God; to all those who believe. Christ is the both the revealer of the way and the way to the Father. God has provided in his Son a means to return to him. *Amida* is the Buddha of Immeasurable Light. *Amida* is the wisdom and compassion of the *Dharma*-body. He seeks to enlighten beings to realize both their helplessness and ignorance of self and of the compassion to save all sentient beings from the cycle of *samsara*. Light in either religions would be viewed as darkness by the other. The light of Christ, not only reveals and confronts evil, but seeks to bring the sinner into relation with God. The light of *Amida* seeks to reveal there is no self or god for which a relationship could be possible.

Life however takes a different approach in Christianity than in Shin. Life in Christianity is related to having a relationship with God. One has eternal life as long as they stand in right relation to their creator. Through Christ, creation was made.[176] **"**All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men."[177] *Amida* Buddha or even the *Dharma*-body-as-suchness is not a creator. Life is an affirmation of being in communion with God. It is an affirmation of the individual self by having a relationship. There always remains God and the person, always ontologically separate. In Shin, after salvation there is no person or self remaining. There is no personal God that remains separate ontologically. Life is union with the *Dharma*-body. "The idea of God as

[176] Jn. 1:10.

[177] Jn. 1:3-4. ESV.

"personal" being appears from the Buddhist perspective to belong to the lower level of truth adapted to those incapable of the highest vision of truth and the ultimate reality."[178]

Finally a comparison may be made on God sustaining creation through Christ. All things are held together by Him; **"**And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together."[179] However *Amida*'s goal is not to sustain the world or its beings, instead his goal is to save beings from it. In Shin, the *saha* world is nothing more than illusion and is evil. When one realizes *shinjin*, they realize the ignorance of the existence of self. The hope is that upon death, they will attain oneness with the *Tathāgata*. One seeks to sustain and the other to dissolve the self.

In the act of Christ, suffering was necessary in order to provide salvation. Christ became sin and was thus experienced suffering apart from God the Father.[180] Christ takes away the sins of human beings in order to reconcile them to God. This separation in itself caused suffering.[181] Therefore for there to be salvation, suffering had to have occurred. D.T. Suzuki has pointed out that this suffering and violent death is the will of God according to Christians. He asks whether or not oneness could have been realized in a less violent way.[182] This of course causes him to refuse to accept the cross. This is

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[178] Keel, *Understanding Shinran: A Dialogical Approach.* 178.

[179] Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3.

[180] Matt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34.

[181] Heb. 5:8.

[182] Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Mysticism Christian and Buddhist*. (Routledge, 2003), 130.

because in Shin Buddhism there can be no Christ that can be crucified, as there would be no being or individual to crucify.[183]

[183] Lefebure, *The Buddha and the Christ: Explorations in Buddhist and Christian Dialogue*. 50.

CHAPTER IV- THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF GRACE

THE PURE LAND AS NIRVANA

In Popular Pure Land thought, at the time of death an individual is met by the *Amida* Buddha and be taken to the Pure Land. The Pure Land was originally conceived as a paradise created by the Buddha to be a realm to where once reached, *nirvana* would be easily attained. There were no more sufferings or death. It was a simple escape from the struggles of day to day life of this world. The cycle of *samsara* was ended and all beings in the Pure Land were in a stage of nonretrogression. The Pure Land was just another Buddha field among many, with multiple buddhas and multiple lands of bliss. This is easily seen when *Dharmakara* had inquired of the Buddha about the Buddha lands and their qualities. The qualities although descriptive according to human means were ultimately inconceivable.[184] Since the character of *Amida* is essentially the same ontologically with the Pure Land, it is a place of light and life. It is a place of purity and wisdom. All of it serving to teach the *dharma*, from the waters, air, smells, etc.

The question however must arise to as if the Pure Land is actually a real place. Some predecessors of Shinran considered the Pure Land a location. Yet Shinran conceived of these as compassionate means. From enlightenment (*nirvana*) perspective there is no longer a pure land to travel to, hence "the land of bliss is the realm of *nirvana*, the uncreated."[185] Therefore the very object of faith is no more.[186] This does not stop the

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[184] Ueda, Shinran, and Hirota. *Shinran: An Introduction to His Thought*. 124.

[185] Shinran, and Dennis Hirota. "Notes on "Essentials of Faith Alone"," in *The Collected Works of Shinran*. (Shin Buddhism translation series. Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwangji-ha, 1997), Vol. 1, 460.

[186] Keel, *Understanding Shinran: A Dialogical Approach*. 161.

descriptions of *Amida* Buddha or the Pure Land from being representative of the true reality.[187] The true nature of reality is inconceivable, and any effort at description is compassionate means. This is why for Shin Buddhists the question of the Pure Land's objective existences is not important, but instead whether someone is worthy to be born there.[188]

The forms that appear in the Pure Land teachings and descriptions are a compassionate means of the formless *Dharma*-body-as-suchness and the formless Buddha. The entire point of the teachings of the Pure Land is to teach of the Primal Vow.[189] Therefore the Pure Land is synonymous with Supreme *Nirvana*, Suchness, Buddha-nature, *Dharma*-nature, and the *Dharma*-body.[190] When a person who has realized *shinjin* dies, at that very moment they achieve *nirvana* and enter a state of eternal bliss and tranquility. They become one with the true uncreated reality of the *dharma*-nature.[191] It is here that one is at union with the formless Buddha. Interestingly enough, this formless Buddha is the same as *Amida* Buddha.[192] The formless form of *Amida* Buddha is a compassionate means of the formless *Amida* Buddha. The story of

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[187] Bloom, *Shinran's Gospel of Pure Grace*. 79.

[188] *Jodo Shinshu: A Guide*. 87.

[189] Shinran, and Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki. *The Kyogyoshinsho: The Collected Passages Expounding the True Teaching, Living, Faith, and Realizing of the Pure Land. (Translated by Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki*. Kyoto: Shinshu Otaniha, 1973), II:2-3.

[190] Keel, *Understanding Shinran: A Dialogical Approach*. 154.

[191] Shinran, and Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki. *The Kyogyoshinsho: The Collected Passages Expounding the True Teaching, Living, Faith, and Realizing of the Pure Land. (Translated by Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki*. Kyoto: Shinshu Otaniha, 1973), II: 103.

[192] Keel, *Understanding Shinran: A Dialogical Approach*. 168.

Dharmakara becomes symbolic for the path of salvation that all sentient beings take who realize *shinjin*. *Amida* is the essence of the Primal Vow of the *Tathāgata*.[193] The message and the messenger are the same in Shin. This would likewise be equivalent to the teaching of *Sakyamuni* in the *Samyutta Nikayā*, "Those who see *dharma* see me; those who see me see *dharma*."[194] This is why Shinran could remark, "only the *nembutsu* is true," since the *nembutsu* and the name (*Amida*) are the Primal Vow.[195] The Primal Vow is the primal will of the *dharma*-body-as-suchness.[196] This primal will was to save all sentient beings. Individuals become one with the primal will and hence will come back to this world as bodhisattvas, working to save all sentient beings.[197]

HEAVEN AND NIRVANA

Are Heaven and *nirvana* comparable? It has already been argued that the human predicaments, grace offered, and salvific figures are different. Now it will be shown that the final destinies in Christianity and Shin have little if anything in common. It should be immediately noted from the last section on *nirvana,* that it is not a destination but more or

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[193] Shinran, and Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki. *The Kyogyoshinsho: The Collected Passages Expounding the True Teaching, Living, Faith, and Realizing of the Pure Land. (Translated by Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki*. Kyoto: Shinshu Otaniha, 1973), I: 2-3.

[194] Ueda, Shinran, and Hirota. *Shinran: An Introduction to His Thought*. 108.

[195] Shinran, and Dennis Hirota. "A Record in Lament of Divergences," in *The Collected Works of Shinran*. (Shin Buddhism translation series. Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwangji-ha, 1997), Vol. 1, "Postscript."

[196] Suzuki and Unno. *Buddha of Infinite Light*. 26-27.

[197] Shinran, and Dennis Hirota. "Hymns of the Pure Land," in *The Collected Works of Shinran*. (Shin Buddhism translation series. Kyoto, Japan: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwangji-ha, 1997), Vol. 1, #20.

less a state of being. Once one reaches *nirvana* there is no place to go. Surely one can argue that all those who have reached the Pure Land will return to the *saha* world in order to save other beings caught in the cycle of *samsara*. However, the *saha* world is illusory and not the ultimate goal. The *dharma*-body-as-suchness is incomprehensible and unexplainable. There will no longer be a self that remains. There is only oneness with the *Tathagata* that is impersonal. Impersonal in the sense that the self is not affirmed in any way.

The characteristics that make up Heaven are easily contrasted to the state of *nirvana*. Heaven will be a place filled with the presence of God. All those who were saved in this world will forever be with God. There is an affirmation of God and the people of God that is eternal. Sufferings are eliminated and there is no more sin. Evil has been forever vanquished. The old corrupt bodies that once were are now replaced with incorruptible bodies that never perish.[198] Contrasted to Shin, while the sufferings are no more, the self still exists. Shin Buddhism offers no new body, because the reality of forms is illusory and false.

All of creation is brought back into order and shalom is achieved. Heaven is the world in proper order and relation to God, while the *saha* world of Shin remains forever in chaos, as Buddhism embraces a cyclical concept of time. The *Tathagata* continues to save sentient beings, but there is never a climax or complete elimination of evil. Not only will a relationship with God be righted, but relationships with other believers will be perfect as well. In Shin, there are no longer any individuals, since everyone has become

[198] 1 Cor. 15:51-53.

one with the *Dharma*-body. This is a striking contrast with Christianity.[199] The very doctrine of justification itself proclaims the importance of personhood in relation to God. Being in relationship with God affirms and puts the person into a right understanding of the self as they were designed to be.[200] As McGrath describes it justification leads beings to transformation and fulfillment through an "encounter with *the* Person who underlies personality itself."[201]

Such relational descriptions are essential for understanding the character and nature of God's kingdom. God's goal in salvation is also to create a chosen people that will forever be with him.[202] Believers have been adopted and given the "spirit of sonship."[203] This is the return to the original righteousness of Adam and Eve before the Fall. They did not earn it but rather it was because of the *imago dei* and the relation found that they had with God.[204] Similar language is found whenever the community of believers is called the Bride of Christ.[205] Christ himself has been called the bridegroom.[206] The Bride is New Jerusalem, the community of believers, who has been

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[199] Matt. 17:3, 22:28-30; 1 Thess. 4:13-18. See Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology*. Vol. 4, (Minneapolis, Minn: Bethany House, 2002), 311.

[200] McGrath, *Justification by Faith: What It Means for Us Today*. 113.

[201] Ibid.

[202] Robert Kolb, "Contemporary Lutheran Understandings of the Doctrine of Justification," Mark Husbands, and Daniel J. Treier. *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates*. (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 163.

[203] Rom. 8:14, 22, 9:3, Gal. 4:3; Eph. 1:3.

[204] Erickson, *Christian Theology*. 975.

[205] Rev. 21:1, 2.

[206] Mk. 2:19.

prepared for an eternal kingdom and reign of God.[207] Martin Luther states that then believers will see God face to face.[208] There in the presence of God, the created order is restored to its KARMoriginal glory with believers being both the children and bride of God.

[207] Rev. 21:9.

[208] Martin Luther cited in, Geisler, *Systematic Theology: Volume Four : Church, Last Things*. 322.

CONCLUSION

As has been argued, Shin Buddhism differs great from Christianity. The argument for grace monism is superficial and has not taken into account the reality of each religions doctrinal core beliefs. While the structure of thought in each religion may be similar, especially with Shinran and Luther, grace serves two different functions in each religion. The human predicaments, purposes of grace, salvific figures, and ultimate destinies of the two are not able to be unified in any way. Christianity offers a form of salvation that is more consistent with the experience of this life.

Each religion presents two views on the human predicament. In both of them human beings are helpless and ignorant. They are evil and face many sufferings in this life. Each of them needs a mediator or other-power in order to achieve salvation. This help or grace is unmerited, undeserved, and bestowed on the condition of faith. However, the root of evil has different sources. Human beings in Christianity have the will to choose to do good or evil. Evil was birthed into the world as a result of a willful disobedience of the first humans. Each subsequent generation has suffered from a corrupted nature and a proneness to do evil instead of good. This evil act is sin defined as a willful disobedience of a personal creator God. In contrast, Shin Buddhism presents evil as a result of the Age of *Mappō*, an age of decline in the teachings of the *dharma*. In the world of the five defilements, individuals may no longer practice the *dharma* in order to obtain merit necessary to attain release from the cycle of death-and-birth. Human beings are helpless to do any good, because their will does not allow it. In fact the will of the individual runs contrary to practicing the *dharma* itself.

The purpose of grace in Christianity and Shin Buddhism are different. Grace according Shin is a transferal of merit upon the individual that places faith in *Amida* Buddha. This merit is enough to break the cycle of death-and-birth. One may have the assurance of *shinjin* in this life and then upon death one will be taken to the Pure Land. This realization allows one to see their evil and thus fully rely on the other-power of *Amida* Buddha. In Christianity grace is offered to the undeserving sinner who is by nature an enemy of God. This grace is offered in the form of Christ Jesus' sacrificial death on a cross as propitiation for the sins of people. When placing faith in Jesus' act, one is forgiven of all sins and restored into proper relationship with God. Both Shin Buddhists and Christians find themselves assured of fulfillment of their salvation, but Shin offers no ultimate justice in the world of illusion. Christianity on the other hand requires justice as God is both the judge and the justifier.

The salvific figures, Christ Jesus and *Amida* occupy vastly contrasting roles. It is claimed that they are either incarnations or representations of the ultimate reality; Christ being the incarnation of God and *Amida* Buddha of the Primal Vow of the *Dharma*-body-as-suchness. They both are the light and life in their traditions. The meanings behind these descriptions show that for each of them the light and life would run contrary to the other. One's light gives the conviction that the self is ultimately false and transient, while the other's convict the sinner towards repentance so that they can be at peace with their creator. Life is offered as union with an impersonal reality of the *Tathagata* in Shin. Life for Christians is one lived in communion with a personal God. Finally *Amida* Buddha seeks the dissolution of the individual into *nirvana* and Christ sustains and restores the individual as creation.

Nirvana and Heaven are opposed to each other, as each one would consider the other destination as a form of hell in some regard. *Nirvana* is a place where there is no god, no self, no friends, and no family; at least as individuals. They are all absorbed into oneness of the *Tathagata* and the self no longer exists. Shin offers no ultimate end of evil as the cycle of *samsara* ever ceases to continue. The Buddha *Amida* thus is never completed in his work to save all sentient beings. Christ offers an eternal creation in peace and harmony with God, never to be destroyed or damaged again. Evil will one day be eradicated and will be no more. Suffering will cease and God will be with his people forever.

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