



Salvation for the Wicked: Comments on Chapter 13 of the Tannisho

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SHINRAN'S EXPRESSION

Among the many characteristics of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism, Amida Buddha's Salvation for the Wicked is the most remarkable. This characteristic emerged from the understanding that the religion, by its very nature, stands aloof from, i.e. transcends, morality. Amida's Grand Vow, itself Grand Compassion, embraces all sentient beings without distinction of good and evil, forsaking none, and thereby transcends the stage of moral values and ethical conduct.

This unique idea is expressed throughout the *Kyogyoshinsho* written by the Master Shinran (1173-2363), founder of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism. In the volume of Faith (*Shinkan*), for example, he confesses his own deplorable condition:

*I now truly realize! How wretched I am! Ran, the stupid bald-headed one, deeply submerged in the wide ocean of desires and cravings, confusingly lost among the mountains of worldly fame and interests, has no aspirations for being counted among the elite of the definitely assured group and feels no pleasure in approaching the really true Enlightenment. How deplorable!*¹

After this serious revelation Shinran quotes a now familiar passage from the *Mahayana Nirvana Sutra*:

*It (Amida Buddha's Compassion) is like the case of a family of seven children in which one is sick. The parental affection does not show any discrimination, but naturally turns toward the sick child.*²

One can also read in the volume of Practice (*Gyo-kan*) of the *Kyogyoshinsho* the Chinese master Jimin's verses as quoted in the master Hosshō's *Jodo-go-e-hoji-san*:

He (Amida Buddha) will come and greet all those who, hearing His Name, think of Him.

And,

*No discrimination against violators of the precepts or great sinners.*³

The Master Shinran believed that the words, "the sick child," "violator of the precepts," and, "great sinner," all corresponded to his own deplorable condition. He clearly expressed this idea in his own words in the *Tannisho*, written by his disciple Yui-en-bo (1222-1289?).

*Know that in Amida's Grand Vow there is no distinction of young and old, good and evil, that the Faith-mind alone is essential, for it is the Vow to save all sentient beings who are heavily burdened with sin and consumed with tormenting cravings. In order to establish the faith in Amida's Vow no other virtue is necessary for there is no goodness that surpasses nembutsu. Evils are not to be feared, because no evil can hinder the fulfilling of Amida's Grand Vow.*⁴

And,

*It is because of Amida's Compassion toward us who are filled with tormenting cravings and unable to liberate ourselves from the bondage of birth-and-death through any other religious practice that Amida made His Grand Vow. Since the real intent of Amida's Grand Vow is to bring the transgressor to Buddhahood, the transgressor who acquiesces in Amida's Will is foremostly destined for Birth in the Pure Land. In this sense, the Master said: "Even the virtuous can attain Birth in the Pure Land, how much more so the wicked."*⁵

I will comment more fully on the idea of Amida's Salvation for the Wicked in my discussion of Chapter 13 of the *Tannisho* wherein the most important Buddhist idea of *karma* (skt. *Karman*) is stated by the Master Shinran.

NOTES:

1. Dr. D. T. Suzuki, *The Kyogyoshinsho*, p. 140 f. cf. A. Bloom, *Shinran's Gospel of Pure Land*, p. 29.

In most cases I have followed the authoritative precedent translation but occasionally I have made revisions to express my own viewpoint. When this occurs an asterisk (*) will be placed as notification

of this change.

2. The Mahayana Nirvana Sutra, *Chinese Tr. Northern ed. vol. 20; Southern ed. vol. 18. Dr. D. T. Suzuki op. cit. p. 151.*
3. *Dr. D. T. Suzuki op. cit. p. 47.*
4. Tan-ni-shō, *Otaniha translation published for the commemoration of the 700th Anniversary of the death of the Master Shinran, 1962 ed. p. 2.**
5. *Ibid. p. 6 f.**

TWO KINDS OF HETERODOXY

There are two common unorthodox views held by some followers of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism. One is the heterodoxy of *zo-aku-muge* (造悪無碍), and the other is the heterodoxy of *senju-kenzen* (専修賢善).

Zo-aku-muge, which literally means “no hindrance despite evil-committing,” is a kind of hedonism or instinctivism. In the *Tannisho* this is rejected by the Master Shinran as well as his disciple Yui-en-bo.

It was said at the time (when Master Shinran was alive) that since the Vow is meant to save those who have committed evil, evil must be pursued as a matter of course to attain Birth in the Pure Land. When ugly rumors about the misconduct of these false followers reached the ears of Master Shinran, he wrote in a letter: “One should not relish taking poison simply because an antidote is at hand.”¹

One can also read the Master Shinran’s admonition of hedonistic views in his letters, e.g. the *Matto-sho*,² the *Goshosoku*,³ etc.

The heterodoxy of *senju-kenzen*, on the other hand, literally meaning “concentrating Practice with Wisdom and Goodness,” is a kind of rigorism or asceticism which is also rejected by the Master Shinran, and Yui-en-bo, in every section of the *Tannisho*.⁴

Those who strive to accumulate merit through their own efforts are not in accord with Amida’s Grand Will since they lack absolute, pure faith in its power. Because the faith of *nembutsu* is not self-effort, nor is it moral goodness, it is beyond all ego-centered efforts. (Vf. *Tannisho*, Chapter 3, 8). The Master Shinran rejected hypocrisy and disliked a show of rigorism, goodness or knowledgeability that inwardly cherished falsehoods. He firmly believed that, in truth, he was nothing but an ignorant being filled with sin and evil, transmigrating endlessly with no chance of self-liberation, and that Amida Buddha’s Power alone could save him.

Master Shinran and Yui-en-bo admonished us not to fall into these two holes of hedonism and rigorism. Shinran stood on a level transcending both extremes. In this sense, we can say that Jodo Shinshu Buddhism stands on the prin-

ciples of *majjhima-patipada* (Middle Path 中道) which makes us sublimate (or *aufheben*) these two bases through mutual denial of both.⁵ As we know, this denial (or *aufhebung*) does not mean mere annihilation. Rather, it makes these two bases sublimed and heightened, giving them higher significance in an integrated dimension through their reconciliation. In general Buddhism this denial is called *sunnata* (skt. *sunyata* 空) or *annatan* (skt. *anatman* 無我), and in Jodo Shinshu Buddhism it is interpreted as “leaving to *tariki* (他力) i.e. “abstaining from *jiiriki* (自力),” or “giving up the obstinate trust in our selfishness.”⁶

I think one can acknowledge that Jodo Shinshu does not merely deny morality, as it rejects the heterodoxy of *zo-aku-muge*, and does not merely affirm morality, as it rejects the heterodoxy of *senju-kenzen* which shows itself as a rigorous moral or ascetic practice. This last point is particularly important to the understanding of the remarkable characteristic of Amida Buddha’s Salvation for the Wicked.

I believe one can correctly acknowledge the real intent of this doctrine by thoroughly understanding Chapter 13 of the *Tannisho*.

NOTES:

1. Tan-ni-sho, *Otaniha ed. op. cit. p. 31.**
2. Shinran-shonin-Zenshu, *Kanko-kai ed. (Hereafter referred to as RSZ), Matto-sho, p. 113 f.*
3. *Ibid.*, *Gosho-soku-shu, op. cit. p. 134 f.*
4. *I presume the major opposing stand of the Tannisho was the heterodoxy of senju-kenzen, which was held in those days mainly in the district of Kanto. Perhaps Zenran, son of the Master Shonin, had encouraged the rising of the heterodoxy. See K. Miyaji, Tannisho and Zenran’s Heterodoxy, Takada-gaku-hō, 57-1966; On Zenran’s Heterodoxy, Kyoto-jyoshi-daigaku-kiyo, 10, 11-1955; Indogaku-Bukkyo-gaku-Kenkyu 4, 1-1956.*
5. *On “Middle Path,” see Mv. I, 6 p. 7-14; SN. 56, 11 vol. 5. p. 420-424; Udāna 6, 8 p. 71-72, etc.*
6. “Anattan” is one of the most essential principles of early Buddhism, as is “Sunnata” of Mahayana Buddhism. Both should be meant not only as objective principles but also as practical ones. That is to say, in Buddhism, to acknowledge the principle of “Anattan” means to become egoless, absorbed, leaving to the “Dhamma” or Buddha. These principles correspond to the principle of “tariki” in Jodo Shinshu Buddhism. The Master Rennyō (蓮如), eighth Abbot of the Hongwanji Buddhist Temple, stated: “Buddhism teaches us that there exists no ‘Ego.’ There are few who believe they are wicked. Those who don’t believe so are to be blamed by Master Shinran. As the Master (Shinran) admonished us to believe in ‘tariki,’ the thought of ‘Ego’ should never exist in the faith of ‘tariki.’” (Rennyō-shōnin-Goichidai-Kikigaki, no. 80, Shinshu-syōgyō-

zensho Kōkyō-sho-in ed., hereafter referred to as SSZ., III, p. 552). "There are few who believe they are wicked. Surely they are to be blamed by Master Shinran. Therefore, unless each, one-by-one, changes his thought of 'Ego,' he will sink into the depth of Hell for eons of time. This is caused by his ignorance of the real essence of Buddhism." (ibid. no. 58, p. 547).

CHAPTER 13 OF THE TANNISHO

I. Some insist that those who are unafraid of evil, out of trust in the Marvelous Saving Power of Amida's Grand Vow, cannot be born in the True Land since their trust is a form of boasting.

II. A. 1. This insistence not only casts doubt on the Grand Vow, 2. but also reveals a total ignorance of the Karmic (or historically, socially conditioned) character of (our presumption of) "good" or "evil." B. 1. a. a. The so-called "goodness" we cherish in our heart is the outcome of our Karmic presumption of "good," just as the "evil" we foster is the result of our Karmic presumption of "evil." In this connection the late Master Shinran told me: "Evils as insignificant as even a speck of dust on the tip of a rabbit's hair or a sheep's fleece are presumed by our Karmic valuation; this you should know."

b. On another occasion he asked me: "Do you believe in me and everything I tell you?" "Yes, Master!" I answered. Again he asked: "Well now, are you certain you won't disobey me?" "Yes, I am certain," I answered respectfully. Whereupon he said: "Could you murder a thousand men? If so, I definitely assure you of birth in the Pure Land." To this I answered: "I respect what you say, but I cannot presume to murder even a single man (for birth in the Pure Land)." Master Shinran continued: "Why, then, did you just say you would not disobey what I, Shinran, told you? Now you see, if your presumption of 'good' is absolute or unmovable you might murder even a thousand men believing in my words that by doing so you could attain birth in the Pure Land. But because this time (different than before), you have no 'karmic' (or voluntary) condition (to presume these words as 'good') you would not kill even a single person. That is why you would not kill; not because your mind (or presumption) is constantly 'good.' Therefore, even though here and now you would not kill, you might nevertheless kill hundreds or thousands of people (at a different time when you presumed it as 'good' according to your historical or social conditions)." By saying this the Master means that whereas we think we are saved by our (self-presumed) "Goodness" and obstructed by our (self-presumed) "Evil," in reality, (transcending these presumptions) we can be saved only by Amida's Marvelous Grand Vow.

b. It was said at the time (when Master Shinran was alive) that as the Vow is meant to save those who have committed evil, evil may be pursued as a matter of course to attain Birth in the Pure Land. When ugly rumors about the misconduct of these false followers reached the ears of Master

Shinran, he wrote in a letter: "One should not relish taking poison simply because an antidote is at hand." He wrote in this way to destroy such misinterpretations. However, it was not to imply that (even in the sense of "religion") evil is quite a hindrance to birth in the Pure Land.

2. a. How is it possible to attain firm faith in the Grand Vow, thereby transcending birth-and-death, merely through observance of the precepts? We can boast (ほこる), we wretched beings, only when fully absorbed in His Grand Compassion. In any event, we cannot do evil unless karmically impelled to presume it as "good" or "necessary." Then those who live by fishing, hunting, trading and farming would do so likewise out of the Karmic impellment of presuming it as "good" or "necessary." "When impelled by certain conditions of your presumption, you would do any act accordingly," said the Master.

After Shinran's death, so-called believers, insisting that only the virtuous should be allowed to call *nembutsu*, arbitrarily established standards of conduct governing membership in the congregation, publicly posted them, and declared that all who violate them should be barred from meetings of the congregation. Such interlopers make a show of being serious, good and wise, yet inwardly cherish falsehoods.

b. Evils committed in the boastfulness of the Grand Vow are Karmically conditioned. To rely upon Amida's Power means to leave "good" and "evil" to their (common-mundane presumption with) Karmic conditions and surrender wholeheartedly to the Grand Compassion. The *Yuishinsho* states: "Why when you don't know how powerful Amida is do you suppose you cannot be saved despite all your sins?"

The very one who could possibly boast of immunity from the consequences of wrongdoing due to trust in Amida's Saving Power of His Grand Vow can be qualified to be the very one who has established firm faith in Amida's Grand Power.

III. A. Some are wont to think that a boastful mind would not arise once bad actions or evil passions were rooted out by our own Self-power, enabling faith in the Grand Vow to be established. But if we could root out all tormenting cravings we could become a Buddha through our own efforts. And if we could become a Buddha through our own efforts, Amida's Grand Vow, which grew out of his meditation for five kalpa, would have been in vain.

B. Those who admonish others not to boast of relying on Amida's Grand Compassion, because such boasting arises from conceit, are themselves filled with tormenting cravings and defilements. For in presuming to admonish others not to boast about the Grand Vow, they are in effect themselves boasting. After all, how different is the boasting of those who say that because of Amida's Grand Vow they can do evil with impunity from the boasting of those admonitors who are proud of not boasting?

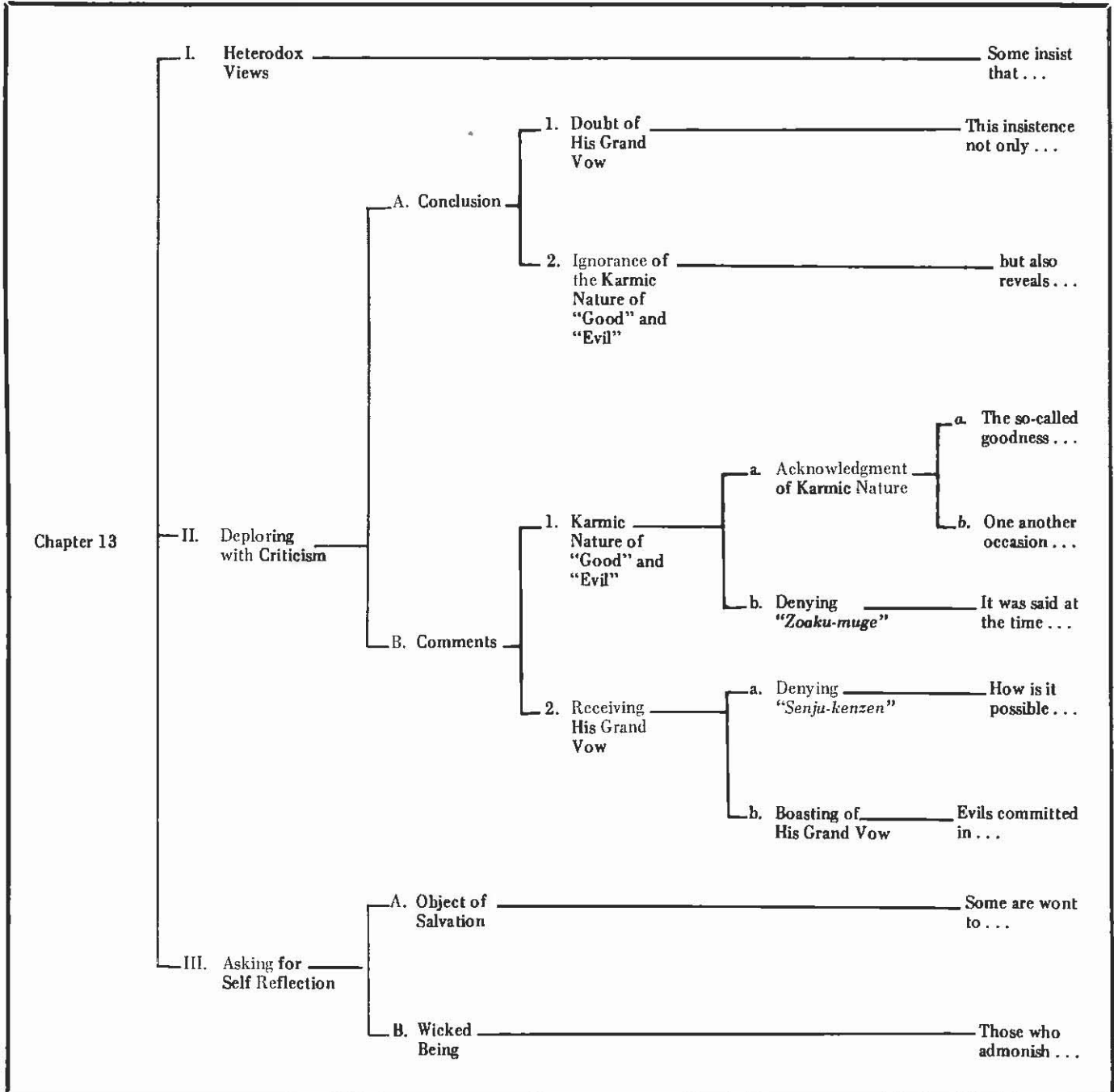
NOTE:

We have many translations of the Tannisho into

foreign languages, due to its religious depth, yet there is no perfectly reliable one available. Particularly with Chapter 13 we find so wide a difference between translations that each translator may be depending on his individual understanding. And so I have tried my own translation while still following closely the Otaniha translation, [1962 ed. See p. 3, Note (4)].

CONSTRUCTION CHART OF CHAPTER 13

This chart is an original trial work. However, it may be enough to show the logicity of this Chapter and its construction.



PRESUMPTION OF "GOOD" AND "EVIL"

I. The heterodox assertion which is the object of the author's criticism is as follows:

Those who are unafraid of evil out of trust in the Marvelous Saving Power of Amida's Grand Vow cannot be born in the True Land, since their trust is a form of boasting.

It is clear that this insistence is a kind of *senju-kenzen* as it stands on the idea that evils must be annihilated and good deeds practiced to attain Birth in the Pure Land.¹

II. A. Against this ethical, moral insistence the author first shows the conclusion of his criticism:

- 1) *This insistence not only casts doubt on the Grand Vow,*
- 2) *but also reveals a total ignorance of the Karmic (or historically, socially conditioned) character of (our presumption of) "good" or "evil."*

Our presumption (or valuation) of "good" or "evil" emerges from our historical or social conditions. He states this truth as "the Karmic character of our presumption of 'good' or 'evil'." According to the Master Shinran's view, our valuation of "good" or "evil" is nothing but the presumption conditioned by our own individual experiences. Here we can see his strong criticism of the idea of "good" or "evil," which is the essence of morals or ethics. Thus he criticized and rejected the teaching of *Shodo-mon*, which was a kind of moral asceticism: "Well," he declared, "It is mutable, changeable, not absolutely definite by all means." Master Shinran's criticism on this point is typically presented in his words written in the "Recapitulation" section of this book:

Good, evil—I know absolutely nothing about this. If

I could know what Amida really thought "good," I could say I knew "good," and if I could know what Amida really thought of "evil," I could say I knew "evil." But because we are filled with all kinds of tormenting cravings in the world that is evanescent, like a house on fire, everything we do, everything that exists, is vain and deceptive, only the Nembutsu (or Pure Religious Faith) is real and true.²

Those unlettered people who know of no "good" or "evil"

*are but of serious heart,
yet I myself vainly pose as wiseacre clever at
knowing of*

"good" and "evil."

I am unable to know what is

"right" or "wrong," "just" or "evil";

I have no claim even for little love and compassion

yet I am willing just for fame and gain

to pose as Teacher.³

NOTES:

1. *The Tannisho is constructed with two main parts, which have, respectively, one preface or prologue, and one recapitulation. The former part (Chapters 1-10) includes Master Shinran's oral teachings directly heard by Yui-en-bo, one of his disciples. The latter part (Chapters 11-18) is Yui-en-bo's intent to clarify his Master's teachings by correcting some heterodoxical assertions which were then held primarily in the district of Kanto among the devotees of his day. Most of these assertions belonged to the heterodoxy of senju-kenzen. Cf. p. 5, Note (4).*
2. Tan-ni-sho, *Otaniha ed. op. cit. p. 53.*
3. *Shinran's Shozo-matsu-wasan (RSZ p. 224).*