

Salvation in the Religion of Faith

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In this essay, I will clarify the structure of salvation in faith-based religions such as Pure Land Buddhism and Christianity. In order to attain true salvation, one must renounce self-reliance, abandon legalism, and devote oneself to selflessness. When we turn around from there, believe in the salvation of the Absolute, God or Buddha, and devote ourselves to that faith alone, true salvation is attained. We find this in Christian thinkers such as Paul, Augustine, and Luther. But we also find it in the teachings of Shinran, the greatest thinker of the Pure Land school of Japanese Buddhism. The more you suffer from afflictions, the more salvation you will find.

Abandonment of Self-Reliance

Religion starts from an awareness of the finitude and burdensomeness of existence. It is from this that enlightenment and liberation are sought. However, even with the same awareness of the finiteness of existence and its burdens, when the path is sought from the awareness of one's own inner transgressions, salvation by God or Buddha is sought rather than enlightenment or liberation. This is where the Pure Land system of Buddhism and the Christian faith come from.

The Pure Land tradition in Japan also starts from a deep awareness of the guilt that lies within us all, and this is why it thoroughly preaches the helplessness of the self and denies the path to liberation through one's own efforts. In fact, Honen also said that in the age of Mappou (the age of the degeneration of the Buddha's teaching), wisdom is already clouded and the path of practice is closed, so the path to enlightenment by one's own power must be abandoned. Shinran was also deeply aware of the sinfulness of our

existence, and therefore, he believed that it was impossible for an ordinary person with a deep sense of sin to wipe out his or her sins, no matter how many good roots he or she may accumulate, and therefore, no amount of action would be sufficient. We human beings, with our deep guilt and abundance of worldly desires, are closed to any kind of practice that would attempt to eliminate them. The Buddha's compassion to save all beings is for such ordinary people who are incapable of self-improvement.

It was with this awareness that Shinran, who himself ate meat and married a wife, called himself neither a monk nor a worldlyling when he was exiled to Echigo. He himself was bound by worldly desires and was deeply guilty of sin, and he was no longer able to perform any kind of ascetic practice as a Buddhist monk. All ascetic practices must be abandoned. That is why he called himself as “not a monk.” But at the same time, he also called himself “not a worldlyling” because he thought he could be saved because of this guilt. In this, we see Shinran's last-ditch choice to be a foolish monk, deeply aware of his own inner sinful karma, and to leave everything to Amida Buddha's salvation.

Shinran, in his "Kyōgō shinshō" (Shin-vol), also believes that our true nature is evil, and that as this nature manifests itself in every action, no matter what kind of good deeds we do, they will always contain poison. He called it "Zoudoku" (sloppy poisonous) Goodness, or "Koke" (meretricious) Conduct, and negate it. He says that even if one tries to pass away in the Pure Land by offering up such Zoudoku (sloppy poisonous) Goodness, it is absolutely impossible. There is a deep awareness of one's own inner sin and a thorough despair of the path of self-reliance. At the same time, there is a deep self-abandonment to the world of salvation.

However, it was not until Shinran was very young that he was able to thoroughly adopt such a state of mind. According to “Eshinni-Documents” (the fifth letter), Shinran was on his way from Echigo to Hitachi with the intention of becoming a missionary to the Kanto region when he caught a cold and fell asleep, then he made up his mind to make a wish to recite the three pure land sutras a thousand times, and started to do it, but he suddenly realized that he had to stop after four or five days. Shinran's purpose was to benefit all sentient beings, but he may have also wanted to strengthen his mind

for the Kanto missionary movement. However, when he thought about it, he realized that this was exactly what he was doing by relying on his own power other than the Shomyo Nembutsu (the invocation of the Amida Buddha's name), and that it was proof that he had not yet truly taken in the teachings of the Hongan Nenbutsu (the total salvation by sole invocation of the Amida Buddha's name). Even Shinran, who was in his early forties, still had the mind to rely on his own strength. It is not so easy to abandon all self-reliance.

Denial of legalism

In Christianity, this denial of self-reliance manifests itself as criticism of legalism. For example, in the New Testament, the Pharisees are constantly criticized for their excessive pursuit of fidelity to the law. The Pharisees believe that God's will is embodied in the Law, and that only by strict observance of the Law can one be saved. However, they were so focused on the individual provisions of the Law that they tended to forget the original meaning of the Law in their zeal to fulfill it in a formal manner. Instead, they tended to criticize others, claiming that those who kept the law were saved and those who did not keep the law at all were not. To Jesus, this was hypocrisy. They had forgotten the true spirit of the law, which is love, and had fallen into the arrogance of trying to win salvation by human power, instead of considering it a gift from God. In Luke (11.39-40, 46-47) and Matthew (23.4-5, 25), the Pharisees are accused of being purified on the outside but full of wickedness on the inside, of observing formal laws but neglecting the justice and love of God. Furthermore, the scribes are criticized for making people carry burdens they cannot bear, but not lifting a finger to carry them themselves.

According to Jesus' faith, the Law sets forth various commandments, but sinful man cannot keep them perfectly. Rather, he said, we must stare at our own inner sin, which we cannot keep, and wait for salvation through God's love.

Paul also believes in "Romans" (9.20) that no one can be justified before God by doing the law. Man is always caught up in the thoughts of the flesh and cannot obey

God's law. Rather, the law only reveals man's sin more and more. On the contrary, the attitude of trying to earn salvation by fulfilling the provisions of the law one by one is an attempt to win salvation in one's own strength. It is to make oneself righteous by one's own strength, which is self-deception. That is what is considered sin. Thus, Paul believed that sinful man is justified only by the grace of God and the atonement of Jesus Christ for his sins, which requires no compensation.

In this respect, Augustine follows the same line of thought. The attitude that salvation is possible through one's own ascetic efforts is rather seen as man's arrogance toward God. It is precisely because man is neither capable nor worthy of saving himself that God's grace works and salvation is granted.

Luther also says that it is dangerous to think that one must be satisfied by faith before every good deed, and that one fulfills God's commandments by one's own good deeds. If one could redeem himself by his own strength, he would not need the atonement of Jesus. Thus, Luther discarded merit on the part of man as worthless. And, as he says in "The Freedom of the Christian," (VIII), the commandments were established so that man might learn to despair of himself, knowing by them that he is powerless against good. Moreover, like Paul, he said that there is no escape from one's inner sin by one's own strength, but only by trusting in the love of God, which is manifested through the atonement of Jesus Christ. It was on this basis that Luther abolished monasteries, permitted priests to marry, and married himself, believing that faith alone was sufficient to earn salvation and that no special good deeds, or acts of celibacy, were required to earn salvation. In Christianity also, in order to be saved, all self-reliance must be denied and self must be renounced.

Awareness of helplessness and conversion

Religious feelings spring from the awareness of one's own powerlessness and weakness. The problems of death and suffering also make us aware of our powerlessness and weakness, but the problem of sin makes us even more aware of our

powerlessness and weakness. Human beings are prone to evil, to sin, and to burrowing in their own vexations. When one realizes this, one knows one's own misery. But this is fortunate for man. For only when man becomes aware of his own powerlessness and misery does he begin to pray to and entrust himself to something beyond himself. At this point, the self knows that it is kept alive by something greater than itself. This awareness is what religion is all about.

When Shinran, a 35-year-old young monk, was exiled to Echigo and forced to take the secular name Fujii Zenshin and live in exile for five years, what he must have experienced was a thorough awareness of his own powerlessness. He was no longer able to wear the monk's robe, and what he experienced must have been a deep loneliness and unreliability. His wife, Eshin, supported him both materially and emotionally during this period of isolation. Through this experience of exile, Shinran was able to find faith in other forces in the true sense of the word. Therein lay Shinran's awareness of his own powerlessness, having lived in the muddy waters of affliction, panting and suffering. However, the saving power of the Amida Buddha's original vow is able to work on those who are aware of their own powerlessness and stand alone. This was Shinran's unshakable faith. Shinran's faith in the absolute reliance on the Amida Buddha was deepened and firmly rooted in the earth at that time.

What Luther also experienced during his monastic life was rather the inescapable inner sin of lust, wickedness, anger, and hatred that nestled within himself. Knowing that no matter what he did, he could never overcome them, he could only become deeply aware of his own helplessness and misery. Luther's faith, in which he renounced all good deeds and surrendered himself solely to God's forgiveness and Jesus' atonement, was the result of such a thorough awareness of his own powerlessness.

At the point of transition from asking for one's own strength to entrusting oneself to the Absolute, there is a spiritual turnaround known as conversion. When one relies on one's own strength and yet realizes one's own powerlessness, one must experience the anguish of anxiety and division, but through conversion, one can attain a completely new and higher unity. The spiritual transformation known as conversion, whether it comes in a sudden or gradual way, gives us the experience of the birth of a new self.

One is born anew, and the self and the world around the self are all transformed and received with new meaning. It is a shift from an awareness of one's own finitude to an awareness of one's own infinity, an experience of belonging to something beyond oneself through setbacks. Here, as in enlightenment and liberation, there is a profound renunciation of self.

The young Shinran, too, experienced a great conversion in the process of turning from his life of ascetic practice at Eizan to Honen's school. Shinran, despairing of his own inability to attain enlightenment through study and training at Eizan, left the mountain and holed himself up in Rokkakudo (at Chohoji temple). He prayed to Prince Shotoku, who was believed to be a manifestation of Kannon, the Bodhisattva of Salvation, for 100 days, and when the prayer was about to be completed in five days, he heard a prophecy from Prince Shotoku. The message was that he should ask Honen of Yoshimizu for the way to salvation. Shinran immediately visited Honen in Yoshimizu, where he was taught that the only salvation in Mappou (the age of the degeneration of the Buddha's teaching) was through Nenbutsu (invocation of the name of Amida Buddha). Since then, Shinran visited Honen's hermitage for 100 days, listening to the teachings of the Nenbutsu school, and finally obtained a firm belief in the absolute power of the vow of Amida Buddha. The circumstances surrounding this visit are known from the "Keishinni Documents" (the third letter).

The experience of becoming deeply aware of one's own powerlessness, letting go of oneself, and being kept alive by the power of the Absolute that transcends the self is nothing short of a conversion. In Shinran's case, this was achieved through a profound encounter with Honen. Shinran, who was a student of Eizan, knew about the teaching of Tariki Nenbutsu (Absolute reliance on the Amida Buddha invoking his name) from an early stage of his life. However, mere knowledge is not a true experience. In Shinran's case, this was experienced through the personality of Honen.

As is well known, Augustine also described his own experience of conversion in his Confessions (VIII.12.29). Augustine was bewildered by the struggle of the two souls, spirit and flesh, within himself, and was plunged into the division and anxiety of the soul. He was deeply ashamed of his own weakness and despair at his inability to

renounce the chains of carnal lust and devote himself to a life of chastity and nobility while others were devoting themselves to a life of chastity and nobility. One day, while he was in the garden, he heard a voice saying, "Take and read," and he opened his Bible at random and found the Book of Romans (13.13-14)

Let us not be drunken and reveling, lewd and lascivious, contentious and envying, but let us walk humbly as though we were walking by day. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Do not set your heart on satisfying the lusts of the flesh.

He found this verse and experienced a great turning of his heart.

This experience of Augustine shows that before one can attain conversion, there must be an experience of deep division between one's own impotence and the self that is aware of it. Through this division and anguish, when the self is cast into the place of the Absolute, a new life can be attained. As Paul says, it is also possible to be born again to God only through the awareness and despair of one's own wretchedness.

Absolute reliance

Religious demands emerge from the awareness of one's own powerlessness. When we are aware of our own powerlessness, we feel a deep sense of despair in the midst of our own misery. However, when we penetrate this despair, when we cast ourselves away and become nothing, we find, on the contrary, a self that is kept alive by and absolutely reliant on something greater than itself. In the experience of conversion, there is such a great transformation of the self. Man is helpless, but it is because he is helpless that he is saved. Humans can be more than humans, but this is possible by letting go of his powerless self and being saved by the Absolute.

Religion is a feeling of unconditional trust in the Absolute that transcends the human. There, the self is grounded and sustained by that which is beyond the self. To find such a self is to awaken to the true nature of the self. Religious awakening is the discovery of such a true self, a new self.

To find the self-reliant on the Absolute, to place absolute trust in it, to find the fundamental foundation of the self, the initial naive self-trust must be denied. Then we must sink into the abyss of despair and pass through that abyss. When the self emerges

from that abyss, it can be reborn in something greater than itself.

When one relies on and is grounded in the Absolute that transcends the self, one becomes a completely passive being in the workings of that great Absolute. The self itself becomes close to nothingness, unconditionally attuned to the Absolute. This is what it means to have religious faith.

In this regard, it must be said that Schleiermacher had a good look at the essence of religion when he defined it as a feeling of absolute reliance. According to Schleiermacher, religion is an emotion of absolute reliance, a longing for God, or the Infinite. It originates in the emotion to be spiritually revived and to expand life. In the early "Theories of Religion," God, as the infinite, is seen as the cosmic, and religion is seen as an intuition of the cosmic and a feeling of reliance on it. The intuition or feeling that attunes to the cosmos, accepts everything like a child, and seeks to be filled with the direct influence of the cosmos, this is what religion is all about.

Shinran's faith in the absolute reliance on Amida Buddha well expresses the essence of this religion of absolute reliance. Shinran's faith was, above all, in renouncing all discretions. Belief in absolute reliance is based on the conviction that one must be fully aware of the depth of one's sins, forsake all kinds of discretions, and entrust everything to the power of the Amida Buddha's original vow. To call out Namu to Amida Buddha and to devote one's life to Amitabha Tathagata means to throw one's whole being into the power of Amida's salvation and to entrust one's self entirely to his saving power. It is the most concise expression of faith in the absolute reliance.

It is impossible for an ordinary person, who is deeply guilty of sin, to attain enlightenment through self-motivated practice. Ordinary persons have no other choice but to renounce all self-motivated practices, to remember the Amida Buddha, and to attune themselves to the Amida Buddha's original vow. This is the faith of Shinran and other Pure Land believers. This is why the Pure Land school of thought emphasizes the importance of "giving heed to." It also emphasizes the importance of abandoning all other discretions and giving heed to and following something absolute and beyond oneself. The original vow of the Amida Buddha is as vast as the ocean emanating from his great compassion to save all sentient beings, having achieved supreme merit and

virtue. It is, so to speak, the fundamental cosmic power. We, who are deeply guilty and burdened with sin, can be saved only when we are deeply aware of our sins, renounce all self-reliance, and entrust ourselves to the power of his original vow. This is the faith in the absolute reliance. This is the essence of religion, which is absolute reliance on a cosmic power.

Christianity also teaches absolute reliance on God. The words of Jesus in Matthew (6.26), "Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them." also tells us that we should live like the birds in the sky, leaving everything to God. The words of Jesus in the book of Matthew (6.28-29), "Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. Like the lilies of the field, people should live their lives entrusting themselves to the absolute God. In the same book of Matthew (18.3), the words, "I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven." These words of Jesus also teach us that, like an infant who is helpless but is therefore held in the arms of his mother without any restraint, we too should be aware of our own helplessness and live our lives by entrusting ourselves to the absolute God.

Augustine, too, attained peace of mind only after he gained faith in absolute reliance. As a young man, Augustine was swept away by a passion over which he had no control, and he was in deep anguish over it, constantly being controlled by the thoughts of the flesh. At the end of this struggle between spirit and flesh, the salvation he obtained from the depths of his anguish was, as told in the Confessions (VII.18), that "man, knowing his weakness and exhausted, has no choice but to throw himself on God." He cannot overcome his passions by his own strength. The way of salvation opens when we are aware of our weakness, which cannot be overcome in any way, and when we surrender everything to the Absolute, which transcends us. As Augustine said at the beginning of his Confessions, our hearts cannot rest until we find rest in God.

Faith only

The feeling of absolute reliance is expressed in the form of faith. The unique religious feeling of absolute belonging to a power greater than man cannot be captured by the mere intellect. It can only be obtained through the act of believing. Even if it is invisible, fictitious, or irrational, faith is the act of believing in something as a truth that transcends the intellect. Moreover, when religion is thoroughly pursued in the direction of faith, whether in Buddhism or in Christianity, all other forms of practice are excluded, and only faith can provide salvation. It is through faith alone that salvation is granted, and no other good deeds are necessary. Religions that emphasize faith alone generally start from the awareness of sin. Thus, it also says that only by faith is one made sinless or saved in one's sin. It says that it is only by faith that sinful man is supported the Absolute.

Shinran's view is also the most thoroughgoing in Mahayana Buddhism as it teaches salvation through faith. Shinran recommended that one should abandon even feascance for Nenbutsu (invocation of the name of Amida Buddha) and devote oneself to faith. Shinran taught that as long as one had faith in the power of the Amida Buddha's original vow, one could be saved and be assured of rebirth to his pure land.

In the Tannisho (The first chapter), it is written "When you believe that you will be saved by the wonderous power of the Amida Buddha's vow and that you will achieve the rebirth to his pure land, then you aspire to chant Nenbutsu (invocation of the name of Amida Buddha), you will be granted the all-embracing never discarding any beings benefits of Amida Buddha's vow. In the true wish of the Amida Buddha, there is no distinction between young and old, good and bad, but only faith is the key.

Here, too, faith in the Amida Buddha's original vow is first and foremost, and only then can one be saved. Nenbutsu (invocation of the name of Amida Buddha) is considered to come naturally from there. In Shinran's view, Nenbutsu is no longer a practice that must be done with effort. In order to be saved, all we need to do is to be fully aware of the depth of our sins, to believe in the absolute mercy of the Amida

Buddha's original vow for salvation, and just to chant the name of the Amida Buddha. Faith alone is the key to salvation.

In the "Tannisho" (The second chapter), there is also the following statement

“In Shinran's case, I have no problem simply believing what my mentor said, that if I simply chant Nenbutsu, I will surely be saved by Amida Buddha. I have no idea whether Nenbutsu will really be the seed to be born in the Pure Land or the karma to fall into hell, but even if I am deceived by Honen Shonin into believing in Nenbutsu and fall into hell, I will have no regrets at all.”

These well-known words of Shinran were uttered to some of his students who came all the way from Kanto to Kyoto to ask him directly about the depths of his faith. At the time, Shinran was 83 or 84 years old. Here again, absolute faith in the salvation of Amida Buddha and absolute faith in Honen, who preached it, are stated.

For Shinran, the most important thing was to be saved by the power of the Absolute in the midst of the reality of life and death, covered in guilt. The experience of having the power of the Absolute break through the barriers of life and death, covered in guilt, which cannot be overcome by our human power, is what is called faith. Shinran believed that only through faith can one enter into the cosmic reality and testify to the truth. In the long transition of the Pure Land school of thought in Japan, Shinran's position of faith alone became more and more thorough in the later years of his life.

Christianity also emphasizes the position of faith alone. Paul, for example, states that sinful man cannot escape sin no matter how much he observes the law, but can only be absolved through faith in God's love and Christ's atonement. As is said in "Romans" (3.28) and elsewhere, a person is justified by faith, not by deeds of law-keeping. This idea of "justification by faith" tells us that there is no other way to be absolved by taking refuge in the Absolute, which transcends human beings, than through faith, and that therefore, no act of self-reliance is necessary to attain it. It speaks of the truth of religion, of a deep awareness of human weakness and absolute reliance on the absolute. Man is saved when he casts away his own strength and surrenders everything to God.

Luther, too, took over the idea of justification by faith, and he thoroughly adhered to the faith-only position. According to "The Freedom of Christians" (25), without faith,

the law, repentance, and all else are futile. It is impossible for a sinful man to be justified by any good works. It is possible only through faith. Only by faith that God saves us from his grace and mercy, and not from our works, can we be justified. Luther, too, was able to escape from his intense suffering and be born again only when he arrived at the idea of justification by faith.

Only the guilty can be saved

As Shinran says, if one believes in the Hongan (Amida Buddha's original vow), one can leave vexations as they are, overcome them, and immediately enter the world of enlightenment. Moreover, if one abandons all self-reliance and trusts in the saving power of the Buddha's true vow, even an ordinary person with a deep sense of sin can be saved. No, it is only ordinary people who are deeply guilty that can be saved. Such a content of belief clearly contains transgressions and contradictions. However, it is precisely because they are irrational and contradictory that we believe. Because it is irrational, we believe. The content of faith cannot be grasped by reason. Faith exists beyond reason.

Shinran's description of the vow of the Amida Buddha as wondrous also expresses that it is beyond reason. Through the working of the mysterious power of the Amida Buddha's original vow, all sentient beings can be saved. This power is beyond the reach of us finite beings and is absolutely super-rational.

Shinran's statement, "Nenbutsu's real meaning is being beyond signification," expresses the fact that the power of the Absolute's salvation transcends thought.

In the Tannisho (The tenth chapter), it is also said, "It is the basic principle in the Nenbutsu that we do not reason within ourselves, for the true meaning of the Nenbutsu is too profound and mysterious for us to express, expound and conceive."

Also in the Mattoushou (Seventh Letter), it mentioned

"The real meaning of Tariki (relying on Amida Buddha) is that there is no discretion. The discretion of each practitioner is called discretion, but since the vows of Tathagata are wondrous, they are discretions between Buddhas and

Buddhas, not discretions of ordinary people.

When we think, measure, share, and question the power of the Absolute from a human standpoint, its meaning becomes problematic. However, faith in the power of the Absolute cannot be assigned any limited meaning, because it abandons all such discernment and consideration, and simply believes in the Buddha's vow. It is a path of abandoning all self-directed efforts, believing in salvation, and surrendering oneself to it. It is a faith that transcends reason.

In Christianity, too, sinful man is forgiven only by believing in the atonement of Jesus Christ for his sins, and this, too, is something that cannot be discussed from the standpoint of reason. It is a divine revelation that transcends reason and rational thought. Just as the Buddha's original vow was mysterious and beyond all reason, so too is the revelation of God beyond reason and to be believed. Religion is beyond reason.

Religious truth always transcends reason and contains transgression. This is why religious truths are expressed only in paradoxes. It is a paradox that both Christianity and Pure Land Buddhism say that it is only the sinful who can be saved. But because of the paradox, the truth can be expressed. Only those who know sin can know the love of God and the mercy of Buddha. Man, always has sinfulness within him, but it is precisely because of this that there is salvation. To be saved by God, one must be sinful. Herein lies a religious truth that transcends moral reason. In morality, guilt is unforgivable, but in religion, guilt is forgivable.

Christianity also teaches salvation from sin through God's grace. Sin is a transgression against God's love, but if man realizes this transgression and repents, his sins are forgiven. God's love for sinners is also a paradox, but it is in this paradox that religious truth is expressed. Man is loved by God because of his sin. Jesus also loved sinners because they were sinners.

As is well known, the book of Matthew (9.9-13) tells us that when Jesus and His disciples were sharing a table with many tax collectors and sinners at the house of Matthew the tax collector, a Pharisee saw the situation and raised a complaint about it. Jesus responded, "A strong man does not need a doctor. It is the sick who need a doctor. He replied, "I have not come to invite the righteous, but sinners. For Jesus, it was the

sin-bearing ones who deserved God's mercy. God's love was to be poured out on those who sinned.

The same thing is also told in the "Luke" (15.4-7) and "Matthew" (18.12-14) with the parable of the lost sheep. When one sheep out of a hundred is lost, one leaves the ninety-nine in the wilderness to search for the lost one. And if he finds this one, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that are not lost. In the same way, the repentance of a sinner is more pleasing to God than the repentance of the ninety-nine righteous who do not need to repent. It is the sinful person who deserves God's love.

The same thing is also told in the well-known parable of the prodigal son in the Book of Luke (15.11-32). The prodigal son, who had been wandering in exile in a foreign land, quickly ran out of his father's ransom and returned to his father, repenting in the depths of his poverty. The father welcomed the son with joy, saying, "This son was dead, but he has come back to life, and he was lost, but he has been found.

If we were to judge the prodigal son on the moral level, we would say that it is unreasonable that the younger brother, who has been prodigal and devoured his ransom, should receive the highest hospitality, just as the older brother of the prodigal son complained. However, in the religious stage, on the contrary, it is the prodigal son who must be welcomed. It is the sinful who must be forgiven and saved. God's love works only for the sinful. The father of the prodigal son lives in a religious world that transcends morality. Therein lies the love of the Father. It is a religious truth that transcends reason. It is the sinful who know their own powerlessness, and it is those who know their own powerlessness who are saved. It is he who humbles himself that is exalted, and it is he who is poor in spirit that is saved.

Paul also says that it is the helpless sinner who is saved. Man cannot escape sin, but because of this, there is atonement for sin in Jesus Christ, and by believing in this, one can be saved. God extends grace to sinful man. The more sin, the more grace overflows.

Luther, who saw the root of human sin in self-love, also believed that human sin could only be forgiven through God's love. No amount of effort can wipe out human sin, and man must suffer for it, but this suffering is the source of salvation. It is through suffering that man can enter heaven. This is because God's love works on human beings

who are afflicted by sin. Man is burdened with original sin, from which he cannot escape. But that is why there is divine forgiveness. Man is both a sinner and a pious man.

Luther, who deeply sought God in his extreme lamentation over human sin and his own impotence, was able to discover God's love, full of grace, behind God's wrath. For such a Luther, forgiveness of sins could only come through the sacrifice of Christ, the Son of God, not through human power. And that was the grace of God. Only God and Christ could suffer for man and forgive him. The forgiveness of sins must be by the work of God through the Word of Christ, not by the work of men. This is why Luther opposed the atonement system of the Catholic Church. Forgiveness of sins can only come through Christ's atonement and God's love, not through the Pope. Luther saw human sin and suffering at its deepest level, and then he said that everyone must stand before God one by one and ask for God's forgiveness of their sins.

Kierkegaard also believes that guilt is a prerequisite for becoming a Christian. Only through the consciousness of sin can one enter Christianity. One can become a Christian by being conscious of oneself as a sinner. He who is conscious of himself as a sinner repents of himself. Repentance is the highest ethical expression. But it is precisely because of this that it is the deepest ethical self-contradiction. Thus, when one repents of oneself, one transcends the ethical stage and enters the religious stage. Through repentance and faith in Christ's atonement, one enters into a deeper relationship with God. Only those who repent of their sins can obtain forgiveness of their sins. One can despair and yet be redeemed. It is the helpless person who can be most powerful. Again, religious truth is expressed by paradox.

The theory to regard the sinners as the major object of salvation.

he idea that it is the sinful who can be saved is preached in Buddhism also. Shinran, in particular, was thoroughly convinced of this. As Shinran deeply ashamed of himself in "Kyogyoshinsho" (Vol. Keshindo), for Shinran, he was an ordinary fool who had no way to leave the world of delusion, and a sinner, unable to return to the power of the Amida Buddha's vow or the great sea of faith. He was a person covered in vexations,

unable to generate faith, unable to realize the wisdom of the Buddha, and unable to enter the Pure Land. However, Shinran's faith was that because of the depth of his sins and the intensity of his vexations, the Buddha's hand of absolute mercy would save him, and all his sins and karma would be absorbed into the great compassion of the Buddha.

Thus, in Shinran, the depth of one's own guilt is no longer an obstacle to salvation, nor is it something to be grieved over. In Shinran, one's own sinful karma is not considered something to be overcome and conquered. Rather, he believes that salvation is found when one leaves it as it is and entrusts everything to the workings of the absolute power of the Amida Buddha's vow. This is the religious truth of the contradictory yet compatible relationship between sin and salvation.

The well-known theory of Shinran's "Akunin Shoki" is the ultimate expression of religious truth through paradox. In the "Tannisho" (The 3rd chapter), it is said as follows

“Since even a good person can be reborn in the Pure Land, it is even more so for a sinner. However, people in the world always say, since even a sinner can be reborn in the Pure Land, it is even more so for a good person. At first glance, this may seem to be a well-spoken statement, but it is contrary to the true intention of Amida Buddha's vow and absolute reliance on it. We, who are covered with vexations, cannot leave the world of life and death no matter what we do, and the Amida Buddha took a vow out of compassion for us to save the sinners like us. Therefore, the sinners who try to rely on the power of Amida Buddha are the ones who have the right cause to be reborn in the Pure Land.”

According to Shinran's view, to attain enlightenment through one's own efforts is to disobey the Amida Buddha's original vow, because it lacks the mind to rely on the power of Amida Buddha. If the correct meaning of the Amida Buddha's original vow is that it is the sinners who are incapable of any practice who will be saved, then it is the sinners who have the right root for salvation. It is the sinner who is deeply guilty who knows his own weakness and knows best that he can no longer be saved by his own efforts in any way. Therefore, it is among the sinners that faith is born. The Amida Buddha's original vow is for such sentient beings who are deeply guilty. In Shinran, a deep awareness of one's sinful karma paradoxically contact with the salvation by the

Amida Buddha's original vow. "The theory to regard the sinners as the major object of salvation" best expresses this paradox.

Faith in absolute reliance on Amida Buddha's vow originally transcends good and evil. All things, good and evil, are saved by the power of the Amida Buddha's original vow. In the Tannisho (Gojo Chapter), it is also said, "The saint said he had no idea about the distinction between good and evil." Here, too, it is said that the world of salvation has already transcended the world of ordinary people, where good and evil are discussed.

Vexation and Salvation

In general, Mahayana Buddhism teaches that it is ordinary people with the greatest number of worldly desires who can be saved. Human beings are always ruled by vexations such as greed, anger, complaining, and delusion, and are always lost, and it has been believed that the work of the Absolute is in such lost people.

Shinran, in his "Tannisho" (the Ninth Chapter), developed a curious logic in response to Yuien. Yuien asked "What is the matter with me that even though I chant Nembutsu, I do not feel the joy of dancing and rejoicing? To this, Shinran responded, "I couldn't help but wonder about that myself. I guess Yui Enbo was thinking the same thing." "But when we think about it, it is probably the result of our vexations that we are not as happy as we dance in heaven and earth. However, since Amida Buddha's vow is especially for ordinary people who are filled with vexations, our rebirth in the Pure Land is already guaranteed. On the other hand, if someone dances for joy and tries to run to the Pure Land, it is doubtful whether he really has any vexations". Shinran's answer was something like this. Here, too, the logic that it is the ordinary person with the greatest number of worldly desires who can be saved is expressed through a double negative. People say things like, "I want to go to the Pure Land as soon as possible," but if they feel even a little unwell, they make a big fuss about whether they will die. But this is also due to vexations. But since it is the ordinary person with all his or her vexations who can be saved, it is these vexations that we should love.

The heart of defiance against salvation, into which we humans always fall, is also

saved precisely because of this. Doubt and rebellion against salvation can also be saved. This is the faith of Shinran. Shinran himself was constantly submerged in the bitter sea of life and death, whether during his youthful training at Eizan (Mt. Eizan), when he was exiled to snowy Echigo, during his missionary efforts in the Kanto region, or when he retired to Kyoto, and often had experiences that shook his conviction of salvation. Each time, however, he became more convinced that it was precisely because of this that he could be saved.

For Shinran, a deep awareness of his own ordinary nature of sin, birth, and death was the only pathway to absolute faith in the power of the Amida Buddha's original vow. The saving hand of the Buddha Tathagata is extended to the world of vexations. To be aware of the inevitability of falling into hell is at the same time a promise to the rebirth in the Pure Land. Here again, there is a profound paradox. Moreover, only through paradox can religious truth be spoken. In the place of religious truth, absolutely opposites are paradoxically united.

Mahayana Buddhism originally taught that the Buddha nature resides in all living beings and that everyone can attain Buddhahood. This is also taught in the Pure Land system in the form that Amida Buddha's vow after contemplation for five kalpas is all embracing never discarding any beings, and that all ordinary beings are saved by this vast and boundless vow. All are saved by the light of the Amida Buddha's great compassion and mercy. The Amida Buddha's original vow is the infinite power to save both good and evil.

In Pure Land Buddhism, the Amida Buddha's original vow is, so to speak, a symbolic expression of the cosmic true life. Absolute faith in the Amida Buddha's original vow which is all embracing and never discarding any beings expresses absolute trust in the cosmic true life. Salvation is the absolute conviction that we are kept alive by a cosmic life that transcends human beings.

(Source: Michinori Kobayashi, "Philosophy of Life" Collection 4, Minerva Shobo, 2016, "The sequel, what is Religion?" The Chapter II, 2)