

Nembutsu and Commitment in American Life Today

by Minor L. Rogers

I. ENCOUNTERING THE *NEMBUTSU*

Encountering the *nembutsu* has changed the course of my life. Let me explain, as this story begins twenty years ago in southern Kyūshū. In 1963, as a Christian missionary from the United States, I was invited by the Japanese bishop of the diocese of Kyūshū—part of the worldwide Anglican communion known in Japan as the Nihon Sei Kō Kai and in the United States as the Episcopal Church—to be Priest-in-Charge of a church in Kagoshima prefecture. In that small town, my responsibilities were to read the prayer book services, preach on Sundays, and go about my pastoral duties as best as I could, given my limited knowledge of the Japanese language. In effect, I was the *rusuban*.

Among the members of the Sei Kō Kai congregation was a man who, stricken with osteomyelitis at thirteen, had been bed-ridden for almost fifty years. This disease of the bone marrow is extremely painful; his legs and arms were covered with dozens of incisions made in an attempt to arrest its progress. I went to visit him often and, as he was bed-ridden, he was a captive audience. But somehow we were able to find ways to exchange what was in our hearts and minds. What struck me most—what really kept me returning for those visits—was his unfailing good cheer and his compassionate concern for those around him. He was active in an organization for the physically handicapped and always available to listen to and counsel his neighbors. He even helped to support himself by copying documents with a metal stylus to prepare them for duplication.

One day he spoke to me of growing up in a

pious Shin Buddhist household. During that conversation, for the first time, I heard the word “*nembutsu*”—saying the Name of Amida Buddha. My friend had lost his mother when he was seventeen and, handicapped, began to feel that he was simply a parasite dependent on others. Seeing the poverty and misery of his family, he felt he had no right to live; he even considered suicide. And some time later, largely through the influence of his physician, he became a member of the Christian church. He told me that sometimes, even though a church member, at moments of sudden pain or fright, without his thinking, the *nembutsu* would come to his lips. In a similar situation, a Christian might say, “My Lord, my Lord,” or “God help me.”

And so it was from a Japanese Christian that I first heard of the *nembutsu*, the practice of no-practice. From this friend, I also heard the name Shinran Shōnin for the first time. Later, in reflecting on these experiences, I became increasingly aware of a dilemma: clearly my friend was a Christian in the fullest sense of the word, yet at moments he said the Name of the Buddha, Amida, who out of wisdom and compassion had vowed to save all sentient beings. I have carried this paradox, or apparent paradox, in my heart and mind ever since, like a Zen *koan*. Might we put the dilemma this way: Are we to say that my friend’s humanity is grounded in Christ-like love, humility, and the spirit of service to his neighbor, and yet does not partake of Amida Buddha’s wisdom and compassion? On the other hand, is it sufficient to note that his humanity is grounded in *myōkōnin*-like absolute entrusting to Amida Buddha, apart from the saving grace of God through Jesus Christ? How is one to sort out these

facts intellectually? How is one to make sense of them morally and theologically?

I suspect it was partly in response to questions such as these working in the depths of my mind that when I returned to the United States, I took up a study of Japanese religion and culture. I learned about the Kamakura period and the lives of the great Pure Land Buddhist reformers—Hōnen and Shinran. In addition, I began to read the works of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, who at that time was Director of the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard. In particular, I was struck by his essay, "The Christian in a Religiously Plural World," in a slim volume published in 1961 in *The Faith of Other Men*.¹ Smith writes of the intellectual, moral, and theological challenge posed for Christians in the contemporary world by an awareness of religious pluralism, in particular the "faith" of other persons. In his *Faith and Belief*,² he argues as a historian and comparativist that "faith" is a universal human quality or potentiality, and he attempts to show that there are concepts analogous to "faith" in the major religious traditions of humankind; that is, for Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, and others. In another of his essays, "Christian—Noun or Adjective," he points out that nouns divide us—it is unintelligible for a person with a traditional Western way of thinking to speak of being *a* Buddhist and *a* Christian at the same time. In the same way, such a person can not literally think of being *a* mother and *a* father simultaneously. On the other hand, in an adjectival or adverbial sense, might not one's humanity be seen as in some sense "flavored" both by Buddhist and by Christian piety? Similarly, any one of us may have both maternal and paternal qualities. In this sense, does not the piety of my friend taste both of Shin Buddhist *shinjin* and of Christian faith?

There were others who subsequently taught me about the *nembutsu*. Masatoshi Nagatomi, professor of Buddhism at Harvard, introduced me to the vast sweep of Buddhist thought in India and China underlying Japanese Shin Buddhism. He himself is a Shin Buddhist priest. Again, in Japan, Futaba Kenkō, professor emeritus

of Buddhist history at Ryūkoku University and also its former president, opened his own tradition to me, an outsider, with his critical historical and theological approach. The Reverend Kenryū Tsuji, former Bishop of Buddhist Churches of America and now resident minister at Ekōji Buddhist Temple in Virginia, has visited our university several times in the past few years to lecture. More recently, the Reverend Michio Tokunaga, in probing for the Indian Mādhyamika roots of Shinran's thought in *śūnyatā* philosophy, and in his work with Professor Taitetsu Unno, Mr. Dennis Hirota, and others in the translation project on Shinran's writings, has made it possible for the Jōdo Shinshū tradition to come alive for me as an outsider. The translators of the Shin Buddhism Translation Series (SBTS), in resisting the common practice of translating Shinran's key concept of *shinjin* as "faith," call attention to the need to understand such religious symbols in their own particular historical context if we are to go on to see *shinjin* as truly universal. Finally, I had the honor of hearing His Eminence Kōshin Ōtani, Monshu, spiritual head of the Jōdo Shin sect speak eloquently in English on Shinshū teachings at a symposium on Shin Buddhism and Christianity at Harvard Divinity School in the spring, 1984.³

In sum, as a Christian clergyman, I find no conflict between my personal "faith" as a Christian and a study of *shinjin* and this personal encounter with the *nembutsu*. Rather, the more I discover the depths of *shinjin* and the power of the *nembutsu*, the more I am able to see the richness of my own Christian heritage.

II. INDIVIDUALISM IN AMERICAN LIFE

I would like to turn now to a major crisis confronting us today as religious persons—Buddhists and Christians alike—in contemporary American life. In order to frame this issue, I have drawn on the work of one of the leading sociologists of our times, Robert N. Bellah, Professor of Sociology and Comparative Studies, University of California, Berkeley. His writings on American society and Japanese culture go far beyond the narrow con-

finer of merely academic discussions. His most recent work is entitled *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*.⁴ A work of collaboration with four other scholars, it received a lead review in the *New York Times Book Review* and became a best seller.

The questions Bellah raises in the preface are these: How ought we to live? How do we think about how to live? Who are we, as Americans? What is our character? In seeking answers to these questions, he and his colleagues met with several hundred people in many parts of the country. They asked about their lives and what mattered most to them. They talked about their families and their communities, their doubts and uncertainties, their hopes and fears.

The critical issue for Americans today, according to Bellah and his colleagues, concerns the kind of individualism that has come to control and characterize our society. "Individualism" is a word used mainly in two senses: first, a belief in the dignity and indeed sacredness of human beings, perhaps an "Other-Power" individualism if we translate this into Shinran's view of reality; and, second, a belief that the individual has a primary reality over and against society—in other words, social reality and social relationships are secondary and merely derived from the reality of the individual. What worries Bellah and his colleagues as they talked with their fellow Americans is the emphasis they heard being given to this second kind of individualism, what we might call a "self-power" individualism that somehow is more real than community. They see this attitude or philosophy as a cancerous growth threatening to destroy the social fabric of American life.

Such a dark analysis of our society or any society is to be taken seriously when voiced by perceptive and concerned persons such as Robert Bellah. On the other hand, this analysis may not be cause for dismay to those living out of Shinran's vision that this is the age of *mappō*, a degenerate age controlled by the illusion that we as individuals have some power to help ourselves. It is an age in which the *Dharma* can be neither taught

nor practiced in a traditional sense, and is no longer efficacious for salvation for those relying in any measure on their own efforts. It is an age in which our only recourse as foolish beings (*bonbu*) is the saving power of Amida's Primal Vow. I believe Shinran's *nembutsu* teaching provides answers; in other words, Shin Buddhism as a way of life offers a devastating critique of self-power individualism and provides vital resources for reawakening a commitment to the very best of humane values in American life.

The authors of *Habits of the Heart* are worried that middle-class Americans have largely lost the language they need to make moral sense of their private and public lives, to see their lives as a whole, and to live with integrity. In their lengthy discussions, what they heard was a preoccupation with fulfilling individual desires rather than any sense of commitment to the common good.

What they call the "utilitarian individualism" of self-practice is the calculating pursuit of material self-interest. They cite the example of a successful businessman who lives in a comfortable California suburb and works as a top level manager in a large corporation. He tells with pride the story of his rapid rise in the corporation. For fifteen years, night after night, he had worked until midnight at his office. He would then go home, go to bed, get up at six, and return to work. When asked why he worked so hard, he said quite simply: "It seemed like the thing to do at the time . . . I couldn't stand not having enough money to get by on . . . I guess self-reliance is one of the characteristics I have pretty high up in my value system."⁵ When asked what values were most important for him in those years, he said, "Perhaps it was success. Perhaps it was the fear of failure. But I was extremely success-oriented to the point where everything would be sacrificed for the job, the career, the company."⁶ Using Bellah's categories, the utilitarian individualist is the person controlled by self-interest, ever striving to be "number one."

According to the study, the other dominant form of self-power individualism today is marked

by a preoccupation with self-cultivation and self-expression which holds that each of us has a unique core of feeling and intuition that needs to be expressed if our individuality is to be realized. As we continue the story of the successful manager in California, we see his shift to this expressive individualism. After fifteen years of marriage and success in business, he came home one day to discover that his wife was seeking a divorce. He reported this as follows: "In fact, our house was for sale, and we had an offer on the house. My wife said, 'Before you accept an offer, you should probably know that once we sell this house, we will live in different houses!' That was my official notification that she was planning to divorce me."⁷

His divorce led to a re-examination of the real sources of joy and satisfaction in his life. In a second marriage, he discovered a fuller sense of what he wanted out of life: "My viewpoint of a true love, husband-and-wife type of relationship, is one that is founded on mutual respect, admiration, affection, the ability to give and receive freely."⁸

We may be prompted to think of this as a story of success. Here is someone who has succeeded materially and then gone on to reach out beyond material success to a fuller meaning in life through sharing with others and building a warm, nurturing family life. But is there any turning of heart and mind—any conversion—here? The authors of the study also question any fundamental change in the language the manager uses to describe what has happened. His language is consistently that of any individualism centered solely on what makes him happy. His new goal—devotion to marriage and children—seems as arbitrary and unreflective as his earlier pursuit of material wealth. Both phrases of his life focus simply on his individual preferences rather than representing a larger sense of commitment beyond mere self-interest. For such persons, the most fundamental ethical virtues are justified as a matter of personal preference; individuals should be able to pursue whatever they find rewarding as long as they do not interfere with the value systems of others.

For example, again in the manager's own words:

One of the things that makes California such a pleasant place to live, is people by and large aren't bothered by other people's value systems as long as they don't infringe upon your own. By and large, the rule of thumb out here is that if you've got the money, honey, you can do your things as long as your thing doesn't destroy someone else's property, or interrupt their sleep, or bother their privacy, then that's fine. If you want to go in your house and smoke marijuana and shoot dope and get all screwed up, that's your business, but don't bring that out on the street, don't expose my children to it, just do your thing. That works out kind of neat.⁹

What we have here is a classic instance of individualism based firmly on the illusion of self-power. To sum up: the argument of *Habits of the Heart* is that too many of us in America today, like the manager, are constrained by a language of self-power individualism. We are incapable of explaining the deepest commitments that truly define our lives. To that extent, the possibility of commitments beyond our own self-interest is seriously called into question.

Bellah's analysis, however, is not entirely pessimistic, for he hears in the language of our religious communities—which he calls communities of memory—resources for reworking deeper levels of commitment. In his study, he takes up primarily the resources of Biblical language of the Jewish scriptures, the Christian New Testament, and the civic republican language of our founding fathers as found in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. However, it is clear to me that comparable resources are available in the Buddhist tradition of Shinran, Rennyo, and Shinshū *myōkōnin*. We are ready now, I believe, to move to the heart of this issue.

III. NEMBUTSU AND COMMITMENT TODAY

One may see little connection between what I

have said thus far and the Buddha-Dharma. The voice of a Shin Buddhist friend, scolding me, rings in my ears. It reminds me that the only thing we can do is to come to listen to the "teaching" again and again; the "teaching" alone is what matters. And woe to the preacher who does not present it! My friend, sometime back, also reminded me that the "teaching" has absolutely nothing to do with sociological and psychological analysis, or even with historical studies. The "teaching" is the Truth expressed in the Pure Land sūtras, in the commentaries of the Patriarchs, in the writings of Shinran Shōnin and Rennyo Shōnin, and in the lives of countless *myōkōnin*. The "teaching" is quite simple: we are to discard—to throw away—every kind of self-power endeavor and rely single-mindedly and wholeheartedly on the saving grace of Amida Buddha alone. What matters is not an individual's success. What matters is living naturally (*jinen ni*). What matters is living free of calculation and self-designing (*hakarai nashi*).

I agree with my friend's restlessness with empty abstractions. At the same time, careful analysis such as Bellah's may help us to identify the key issues more clearly. Our problem as foolish beings is to live naturally and free of calculation and design in a society that deliberately and systematically and with calculation promotes, advertises, rewards, and celebrates the distorted notions of self-power individualism we have been discussing. In short, ours is a crisis in commitment: how are we to nurture commitments to the needs of society at large?

IV. SHINJIN AS COMMITTED LIFE (SHINRAN)

The Shinshū tradition has the resources to address this crisis of commitment in American life in a fresh and striking way. As Shin Buddhists, you have available in your tradition, as a community of memory, a vision of Truth expressed in religious symbols capable of leading men and women—young and old, rich and poor, Easterner and Westerner—in America today to a commitment beyond material self-interest, beyond preoccupation with self-cultivation and self-

expression.

I find that vision of Truth clearly set forth in Bishop Seigen Yamaoka's discussion of the six aspects of *shinjin*.¹⁰ Are not the six aspects of the one mind of *shinjin*—expanding, self-reflection, great compassion, great joy, gratitude, life of meaning and growth—a striking and profound answer to the crisis in commitment in American life today? May we not read Shinran's letters to the *nembutsu* devotees in the Kantō in 13th century Japan, especially the twentieth letter in *Mattōshō* as a homily (*monpō*) on commitment?

Shinran is addressing problems in the *nembutsu* community brought about by misunderstandings of the "teaching." Perhaps the fundamental problem was not so different from ours in American life today: an individualism based on calculating pursuit of self-interest and an indulgent preoccupation with self-expression. Might we not say that Shinran saw self-reliance on the one hand and antinomian tendencies on the other as cancerous growths threatening to destroy the life of that first Shin Buddhist community? He sharply contrasts persons of *shinjin* with those who abuse the teaching. On the one hand, of those caught up in the process of *shinjin*, a life of meaning and growth through the non-working which is the true working, he says:

There was a time for each of you when you knew nothing of Amida's Vow and did not say the Name of Amida Buddha, but now, guided by the compassionate means of Sākyamuni and Amida, you have begun to hear the Vow. Formerly you were drunk with the wine of ignorance and had a taste only for the three poisons of greed, anger, and folly, but since you have begun to hear the Buddha's Vow you have gradually awakened from the drunkenness of ignorance, gradually rejected the three poisons, and come to prefer at all times the medicine of Amida Buddha.¹¹

On the other hand, of those yet asleep in the drunkenness of ignorance, addicted to the three

poisons of greed, anger, and folly, and resisting the healing power of the medicine of Amida Buddha, Shinran says:

In contrast, how lamentable that people who have not fully awakened from drunkenness are urged to more drunkenness and those still in the grips of poison encouraged to take yet more poison. It is indeed sorrowful to give way to impulses with the excuse that one is by nature possessed of blind passion—excusing acts that should not be committed, words that should not be said, and thoughts that should not be harbored—and to say that one may follow one's desires in any way whatever. It is like offering more wine before the person has become sober or urging him to take even more poison before the poison has abated. "Here's some medicine, so drink all the poison you like"—words like these should never be said.¹²

Finally, Shinran vividly spells out the dynamic processes of *shinjin* at work in human life:

In people who have long heard the Buddha's Name and said the *nembutsu* surely there are signs of rejecting the evil of this world and signs of their desire to cast off the evil in themselves. When people first begin to hear the Buddha's Vow, they wonder, having become thoroughly aware of the karmic evil in their hearts and minds, how they will ever attain birth as they are. To such people we teach that since we are possessed of blind passion, the Buddha receives us without judging whether our hearts are good or bad.

Moreover, since *shinjin* which aspires for attainment of birth arises through the encouragement of Śākyamuni and Amida, once the true and real mind is made to arise in us, how can we remain as we were, possessed of blind passion?¹³

V. HOW WE ARE TO ENTRUST (RENNYO)

It falls to Rennyo Shōnin, the fifteenth-century "restorer" of the Shinshū, to clarify *how* one is to enter into the life of *shinjin*. It is Rennyo's unique contribution to make known "in what manner we are to entrust." As one of the memoirs puts it:

As for [Shinran] Shōnin's tradition, the essential point is the one thought-moment of entrusting. For this reason, [his successors], generation after generation, taught what we call "entrusting," but we did not know precisely in what manner we were to entrust [ourselves]. That being the case, . . . [Rennyo] . . . wrote the *ofumi* during his tenure and clearly informed [us], "*Zōgyō o sutete goshō tasuke tamae to isshin ni mida o tanome* (Give up miscellaneous practices and single-mindedly entrust [yourselves] to Amida for deliverance [in the matter of] the next life)." Hence [Rennyo] is considered the revered master, the "restorer."¹⁴

Over the centuries, with greater chronological distance and perspective on his place in the tradition, Rennyo has come to be most commonly known as *chūkō shōnin*, "the revered restorer [of the tradition] in mid-course," or even "second founder." It is Rennyo Shōnin more than any other figure in Shinshū history who has enabled Shinran's teaching to be handed down over the centuries, and to be available to us today. In this sense, he is revered as restorer of the tradition; his words are the very words of Amida. Yet, Rennyo has frequently been the target of harsh criticism for his aggressive evangelist practices in building the Hongwanji into a powerful institution and into a major political force in late medieval Japan.

According to Marxist historians such as Hattori Shisō, Rennyo is to be compared with Tokugawa Ieyasu in his cunning and coarseness as a political strategist. Clearly there are two sides to Rennyo's character. He was a man of his time, Sengoku Japan, and during that period the survival and prosperity of Hongwanji demanded sharp political instincts and skill in the use of political

power. Rennyo was also a religious genius transcending his time in his absolute devotion to expanding the Hongwanji as the vehicle for preserving and spreading the Buddha-Dharma.

One of the people who has helped me most in understanding Rennyo's life and character is the contemporary novelist, Niwa Fumio, an eldest son, born into a Shin temple household. Many of his works such as *Bodaijū* (*The Buddha Tree*) treat Buddhist themes. He serialized his *Rennyo* over a ten-year period, 1971-1981, in 121 installments in the magazine *Chūō Kōron*. *Rennyo* was subsequently published as an eight-volume work.

In a postscript to the last volume, he tells of an incident involving a talk he gave on Rennyo in 1982 before a thousand people in the Cultural Center of Kanagawa on the Japan Sea.¹⁵ After the lecture, he received a letter from a woman who had been in the audience. Moved by the spontaneity of her account, he substituted her letter, in full, for the postscript planned for the *Rennyo* volumes. He explains that her letter seemed to complete his ten years of labor. It was as if someone had written for him precisely what he had longed to realize himself.

The woman writes first of having read Niwa's *Shinran*. Raised in a pious Buddhist home, she had, nonetheless, begun to have doubts about her faith as she grew older. This state of mind continued into old age. But when her daughter brought her Niwa's *Shinran*, she felt, reading with tears of gratitude, that she was able to "draw correctly and clearly from the deep well of Shinran's teachings." She came to feel that Niwa was Shinran himself. She felt herself accepted, for the first time, with an unwavering certainty.

Significant in her experience was that she was the youngest in a family of six children. Her father died at fifty-two, when she was only five. During the brief years they shared together, he lavished affection on her as the youngest child, sensitive to the difficulties she would face after his death. Her experience led her to wonder in later years how Rennyo had viewed his own chil-

dren born when he was in his seventies. Although Rennyo had been badly treated by a stepmother, he had allowed his own children to be raised, one after another, by a series of stepmothers. Why had he, in his old age, chosen young partners in marriage? Having children of her own, she was dismayed and critical of Rennyo's behavior. She could not imagine acting in such a way herself. In listening to Niwa's lecture, however, she "noticed a very important thing":

It was precisely because of Rennyo's meritorious deed in bringing prosperity to Hongwanji and the Jōdo Shinshū, in an extreme state of decline, that it was possible for me to be raised within this teaching. Because of that [Rennyo's work], you [Niwa Sensei] are here and I was able to come upon your *Shinran*. When I thought of that, I came to wonder to what extent Rennyo's private life was important.¹⁶

In short, she realized that, finally, the "teaching" is of far greater importance than any individual's personality. After the close of her letter, Niwa reflects:

In the novels up to this point, concerning the three issues for which Rennyo was criticized, I presented the facts and gave the arguments opposing the misunderstandings; . . . I believe that I was able to gain full agreement [on the first two]. But in regard to the five marriages and the twenty-seven children, I was unable to add any new interpretation. It was an elderly lady who by chance came to hear my lecture, who was able, while she was listening to my talk, to lay aside her preconceptions in regard to Rennyo's personal life, completely naturally—as she said in her letter, "I noticed a very important thing." That was something of a nature that I—a novelist—could never force, even in my novels or in facing an audience.¹⁷

I believe that we have here a clue to the relationship between Shinran and Rennyo. Living

two centuries apart in very different social contexts, their lives and writings have complemented one another to insure continuity in the "teaching." As "founder" and "restorer," they provide for us today a community of memory defined in part by its past and the memory of its past. In short, that enduring community provides a context for *shinjin* as committed life today, transcending the individualism of a calculating pursuit of material self-interest and a preoccupation with self-cultivation and self-expression.

VI. THE IDEAL LIFE AS REAL (MYŌKŌNIN)

It is especially interesting to me as a student of Rennyo's life and thought to discover that it is one of his followers who appears to head the list of *myōkōnin*. It is Dōshū of Akao who is said to have served Rennyo as his escort-guard in the Hokuriku. Dōshū's response to Rennyo's person and teaching may be taken as a mirror image of Rennyo's own piety, piety that is an ellipse with twin foci: Amida and the Hongwanji. Dōshū's life was lived in grateful response to Rennyo and Shinran as representative of the Hongwanji's guardianship of the teaching of Amida's Primal Vow. Dōshū as the model of Shinshū piety is quoted by Rennyo as follows:

As a matter of daily concern, we should never neglect the morning service at the family altar; we should make monthly visits to the nearest sub-temple to express our devotion to the founder, [Shinran] Shōnin; and each year, we should make a pilgrimage to the head temple [Hongwanji].¹⁸

Further, Dōshū considered Rennyo as the restorer of the Hongwanji to be a manifestation of Amida. He once said he would fill Lake Biwa with mud by himself if Rennyo told him to do so. Out of devotion to the Buddha-Dharma, he slept on a stack of forty-eight sticks to remind himself of Amida's forty-eight vows. Unable to sleep soundly, he constantly held in mind his gratitude for Amida's *kalpas* of *bodhisattva* practice as Dharmākara for his [Dōshū's] sake alone.

Among Dōshū's successors in modern time is, of course, Saichi, maker of *geta*, who in his unique script wrote poems on the wood chips in his workshop. It is Rennyo himself and his writings, *Gobunshō*, that decisively shape Saichi's piety.

Hey, you Saichi!
Who'd you hear
Namu Amida Bu[tsu] from?
Well, I heard it
from Master Rennyo.
Oh, come now, Saichi—
There's four or five hundred years
between Master Rennyo and you.
That's telling a lie, Saichi.
It isn't a lie! It's
in the *Gobunshō*. The
Gobunshō are Master Rennyo.
Well then, what sort of person
is Master Rennyo? You,
Saichi! Won't you
tell me?
Well, Namu Amida Bu[tsu]
is Master Rennyo!
Surely Namu Amida Bu[tsu] couldn't
be Master Rennyo!
Well—when Namu Amida Bu[tsu] lives and works,
that's Master Rennyo.¹⁹

I am tempted to try to summarize my remarks into a concise conclusion. The real point, however, is that there is no conclusion to the dynamic, living tradition of Shinshū in which you are participants. It is a tradition new every morning, which each of you redefines as you go about living each day. To the extent that we are open—or are opened—to the truth of Amida's Primal Vow and the nurture of His wisdom and compassion, we transcend naturally the self-power individualism that so threatens American life today. Further, we move, or are moved, beyond a definition of success as narrow self-interest and preoccupation with self-cultivation and self-expression to compassionate concern for all sentient beings.

As a Western-educated Christian, I am not a Shin Buddhist in a formal sense. I have, however, been touched by the healing light of Amida's

wisdom and compassion as it has been at work in the Shin Buddhists whom I have known. That is, through the writings of Shinran Shōnin and Rennyo Shōnin, and in the lives of their heirs in *shinjin-myōkōnin* in Kagoshima, in Boston, in Kyoto, in Virginia, and finally here in San Jose. Praise be to Amida Buddha for providing us with such a path of compassion.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Faith of Other Men* (1962; New York and London: Harper and Row, 1972).
2. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Faith and Belief* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).
3. See "Symposium on Shin Buddhism and Christianity: Textual and Contextual Translation," *Bulletin: Center for the Study of World Religions* (Harvard University: Fall, 1984), pp. 2-8.
4. Robert N. Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California, 1985).
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.
10. Seigen H. Yamaoka, *The Six Aspects of Jōdo Shinshū* (Denver: Buddhist Churches of America, 1982), pp. 2-17.
11. Yoshifumi Ueda, ed., *Letters of Shinran, A Translation of Mattōshō* (Kyoto: Hongwanji International Center, 1978), pp. 60-61. Also, Shinshū Shōgyō Zensho Hensanjo, ed., *Shinshū shōgyō zensho*, 5 vols. (Kyoto: Ōyagi Kobundō, 1967-70), 2:690; cited hereafter as SSZ.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 61; SSZ 2:690-92.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62; SSZ 2:691-92.
14. SSZ 3:577.
15. Niwa Fumio, *Rennyo*, 8 vols. (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1983) 8:317-21.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 320.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 220-21.
18. SSZ 3:544; English translation here based on that of Daisetz Suzuki, in *Japanese Spirituality*, tr. Norman Waddell (Tokyo: 1972), p. 169.
19. Suzuki Daisetsu, *Myōkōnin Asahara Saichi shū* (Tokyo, 1967), pp. 79-80.