

Exclusion and Salvation in Hōnen's Thought: Salvation of Those Who Commit the Five Grave Offenses or Slander the Right Dharma¹

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I. INTRODUCTION

PURE LAND BUDDHISM POSSESSES many distinctive features, chief among which is the perspective that Pure Land doctrine brings to questions regarding humanity. Questions such as “What is a ‘human being’?” and “How is the definition of ‘human being’ related to the Pure Land teachings?” have been central to the tradition’s historical development. The Japanese Pure Land master Hōnen (1133–1212) made various comments regarding the human question, and in later studies of Hōnen’s doctrine there has been much attention given to his view of humanity.

Discourse on the view of human beings in the Pure Land teachings culminated historically in a theory, offered by Shinran in the Kamakura-era, that the “evil person is the true object of Amida’s Vow.” The evil person is the very person for whom Amida’s salvation was intended. All human beings, moreover, are evil persons. For Shinran, the proof for the existence of such an evil person could be found “within myself, alone.” Shinran’s view of humanity is perhaps one of the most distinctive among those present within the Pure Land teachings. Some scholars, however, believe that the notion that the “evil person is the true object of the Vow” was already present in Hōnen’s thought, prior to Shinran’s elucidation of that idea. That is to say, according to this scholarship, the idea that the “evil person is the true object of the Vow” represented Hōnen’s own view of humanity. We must also note, however, that this scholarship has been the subject of some criticism.

Previous studies have already organized and introduced the various theories related to this idea.² Recently, research has placed particular focus on the treatment of textual materials related to the notion that the “evil person is the true object of the Vow” and, based on these, a variety of new theories have been offered. The most authoritative materials pointing to

Hōnen's thinking on this doctrinal matter can be found in his religious instructions, known collectively as *Sanjin ryōken oyobi gohōgo* (*Clarifications and instructions [related to] the three minds*), which have been compiled in the *Daigobon Hōnen Shōnin denki* (*Biographical Records of the Master Hōnen, Daigo Manuscript*).

Scholars have offered differing theories as to the formation of the *Daigobon Hōnen Shōnin denki*. There have been numerous studies related to the text and future examinations are expected to add greatly to our knowledge of the text. However, it is generally believed that the text originated with the handwritten manuscript of Gien, the seventy-ninth head priest of the Daigo-ji temple. Alternatively, someone within Gien's circle could possibly have copied it at his request. Because the original hand-copied manuscript is no longer extant, there are conflicting theories about its composition and development. The view that has gained some acceptance within current academic circles is that it was probably compiled by some of the disciples of Seikan-bō Genchi.

Further, the Daigo manuscript is made up of six parts: (1) *Hōnen Shōnin denki*, (2) *Jūni mondō* (*Twelve questions and answers*), (3) *Sanjin ryōken oyobi gohōgo*, (4) *Betsu denki* (*A separate biography*), (5) *Gorinjū nikki* (*A diary of the last moments of his life*), and (6) *Sammai hottokki* (*Records of the attainment of samādhi*). We are unable to draw any clear conclusions as to whether the disciples compiled these materials themselves or simply copied manuscripts that had already been compiled. Examinations of a recently published photographic reproduction of the *Daigobon Hōnen Shōnin denki*³ reveal that the brushwork and penmanship of the manuscript do not necessarily appear to be consistent throughout the work. This might indicate that the materials once consisted of a number of separately completed works. It might even have been the case that each chapter of the original manuscript was compiled or copied separately from the other texts.⁴

Be that as it may, the *Sanjin ryōken oyobi gohōgo* represents materials that seem closely connected to Hōnen's theory that the "evil person is the true object of the Vow." According to a passage set forth therein,

Even a good person attains birth in the Pure Land. So it goes without saying that an evil person will. This teaching has been orally transmitted in our tradition. To this I say that Amida's Primal Vow does not establish a provisional teaching allowing good persons to become free of birth-and-death through self-power. [Rather, Amida gave rise to the vow] out of pity for persons whose karmic evil is extremely heavy—those persons for whom there is no other provisional teaching.

That being so, bodhisattvas and wise sages aspire for birth, and these good beings attain birth by taking refuge in this vow.

How much more so will foolish beings of sin and evil entrust themselves to this Other Power! They should understand that they are evil, and not dwell in false views. It is said that “both foolish, ordinary beings and sages together” are able to attain this thought.⁵

The initial expression, purportedly received through oral transmission, is identical with the well-known opening passage of Chapter Three of the *Tannishō* (*A Record in Lament of Divergences*).⁶ Opinions differ as to whether this expression, set forth as part of an oral Pure Land transmission, represents a stance taken by Hōnen, or whether it was added later to the manuscript by another person. Such opinions are not limited to this expression. There are also conflicting opinions regarding the inclusion of the *Sanjin ryōken oyobi hōgo* itself within the *Daigobon Hōnen Shōnin denki*. Two examples include Mochitzuki Shinkō's early theory that it was appended by another author⁷ and Tsuboi Shun'ei's recent view that it is from a religious instruction made by some person from Ryūkan's lineage.⁸ Indeed, a further task would be to answer the question of how far back we need to trace the *Daigobon Hōnen Shōnin denki* itself, in order to be able to accept it as original source material.

Certainly, as Tsuboi points out, this passage represents an internally consistent Buddhist instruction, which emphasizes the salvation of the evil person. Hōnen goes on to say,

We are taught that the evil being is an individual person, and that this being will attain birth. This is the teaching of our Pure Land School. Our school takes the evil person as the model, one that includes the good person as well. The Path of Sages takes the good person as its model, which includes the evil person.⁹

We should take note here of Hōnen's assertion that the Pure Land School “takes the evil person as its model, one that includes the good person.” He then states,

All beings are included within this dharma.

The Eighteenth Vow speaks of “sentient beings of the ten quarters.” [This means that,] throughout the ten quarters, no sentient beings are excluded, and that “[beings of] the ten quarters are all included within my vow.” Regarding this, the Dhyana Master Fa-chao states,

That Buddha, in the causal stage, made the universal Vow:
When beings hear my Name and think on me, I will come to

welcome each of them,
 Not discriminating at all between the poor and the rich and
 wellborn,
 Not discriminating between the inferior and the highly
 gifted,
 Not choosing the learned and those upholding pure pre-
 cepts,
 Nor rejecting those who break precepts and whose evil
 karma is profound.
 Solely making beings turn about and abundantly say the
 nembutsu,
 I can make bits of rubble change into gold.¹⁰

Based on this passage we should know that, even though we may be poor, unable to generate merit, fail to understand the teachings, violate the precepts, or commit karmic sins, [the Buddha] will bring us to turn about at heart and recite the nembutsu many times.¹¹

Here, Hōnen, explains that all sentient beings are included within the working of the Primal Vow, which is directed to “sentient beings of the ten quarters.” Hence, it emphasizes that the salvation of the Primal Vow does not exclude anyone. He cites a well-known passage, “That Buddha, in the causal stage, made the universal Vow . . .”, from Fa-chao’s *Wu-hui fa-shih tsan* (*Shorter Pure Land Liturgy of Nembutsu Chant in Five Stages*)¹² in order to attest that, when even those who are poor, of inferior learning, and violate the precepts turn about at heart and say the nembutsu, the path of salvation will unfold for them.

This material enables us to perceive Hōnen’s understanding of the salvation of the evil person. He also cites the same passage from Fa-chao’s text as proof of the virtue of the ease of practice in the Chapter on the Meaning of the Primal Vow in his *Senjaku hongan nembutsu shū* (*Passages on the Nembutsu Selected in the Primal Vow*).¹³ There, he takes up the two virtues of the superiority and the ease of practicing the nembutsu selected in the Primal Vow in order to explicate the salvation of all persons, through the working of Amida Buddha’s compassion of equality. In this way, we can see a connection between Hōnen’s instruction regarding the salvation of the evil person and the position taken in the *Senjakushū* as to the salvation of those who violate the precepts or are without precepts. The latter stance was clearly not adopted from other masters. Rather, one can draw it out from the flow of thought in the *Senjakushū*. We will later examine the view of human beings present in the *Senjakushū*. However, we should note that the salvation of those who slander the right dharma is not mentioned at all in Hōnen’s text.

II. SALVATION OF THE EVIL PERSON IN HŌNEN'S THOUGHT

Although the notion that the “evil person is the true object of Amida’s Vow” can be seen in Hōnen’s thought, it is not completely identical with the stance taken by Shinran.¹⁴ We will now look at how Hōnen explains his unique notion of the salvation of the evil person. He states in the *Sanjin ryōken oyobi gohōgo*,

On good and evil beings.

One who says the nembutsu should simply do so in accordance with one’s own nature. A good person as a good person and an evil person as an evil person—each should say the nembutsu in accordance with one’s basic nature. When entering the nembutsu [path], for the first time one will not be bound by [the question of] whether one either observes or violates the precepts. One simply says the nembutsu in accordance with one’s essential nature.

In reference to this, I ask: When a person who had originally observed the precepts in the Path of Sages takes refuge in the Pure Land Path, he gives up observing both the general precepts and precepts of abstinence, and performs the exclusive practice of the nembutsu. [That is,] he can commit the offense of violating the precepts. Why is this so?

Answer: If a nembutsu practitioner, who wishes to commit an evil act thinks that saying the nembutsu would extinguish his sins, his committing of evil would truly be an evil thing. In the Shingon school esoteric rites are performed to extinguish evil passions. One relies upon those rites, as well as on-going rites performed to subdue future evil. In the same way, one who commits evil acts while entrusting in the power of the Primal Vow to extinguish one’s sins will not suffer in the least.¹⁵

Hōnen explains that one says the nembutsu in accordance with one’s basic nature—a good person says the nembutsu as a good person, and an evil person recites it as an evil person. He advances the notion that the nembutsu, which accords with one’s essential nature, frees one from attachments to the question of whether one observes or violates the precepts. However, he states, it is wrong to commit evil, thinking that one’s sins will be extinguished with the recitation of the nembutsu, even though one has violated the precepts. On the other hand, he states that it is not an error for one who will commit evil to entrust in the power of the Primal Vow that extinguishes one’s sins. If a person, who had been observing the precepts in the Path of Sages, takes refuge in the Pure Land Path of the exclusive practice of the nembutsu, he will come to abandon those precepts. Even in that case,

Hōnen does not approve of saying the nembutsu for the purpose of extinguishing sins. Rather, Hōnen states that when one says the nembutsu, entrusting in the Primal Vow and being carried by that Vow, even the person who violates precepts is saved, just as he is. In this case, although he states that both good persons and evil persons are the objects of salvation, in the final analysis he comes to focus his inquiry upon the person who violates the precepts and commits evil acts in his life.

In the *Jūni mondō* as well, Hōnen discusses saying the nembutsu in accordance with one's nature. However, he then goes on to state,

The person of the nembutsu just says [the nembutsu] in accord with his nature and so attains birth. The wise person says it as a sage and attains birth. The foolish person says it as a fool and attains birth. A person who aspires for enlightenment says it and attains birth; one who does not aspire for enlightenment says it and attains birth. A person who is given to false views says it and attains birth. Those who are wealthy and noble, those who are poor and humble, those whose desires are profound, those of anger and wrath, those with compassion, those without compassion—if they simply say the nembutsu, then all will attain birth through the inconceivable Primal Vow.¹⁶

Here, Hōnen considers the wide variety of human capacities and discusses the attainment of birth by beings of all different capabilities. He explains that, if one says the nembutsu, one will attain birth through the inconceivability of the Primal Vow; all persons will be saved through the nembutsu that accords with the Primal Vow. Even while discussing the salvation of the evil person, he sets forth a path to birth in the Pure Land that recognizes all people, whether good or evil in terms of their human capacities.

Hōnen did not teach about the salvation of the evil person alone; rather, his view encompassed both good and evil persons.

Even though our karmic evil is deep, we have not yet committed the five grave offenses.¹⁷

Even though we have entered the last dharma-age, one hundred years have not yet passed; even though our karmic evil is deep, we have not yet committed the five grave offenses.¹⁸

Here, Hōnen states that persons of his time had already entered the last dharma-age, but that one hundred years had not yet passed. His mention of the last dharma-age, however, was not meant to imply that persons of that era who had not yet committed the five grave offenses would be saved.¹⁹ Neither did he mean that those who had already committed these

offenses would not be saved. Rather, he states that all persons will be saved.

Persons with wisdom and without wisdom, persons of karmic sins and those without, good persons and evil persons, those who observe the precepts and those who violate them, men and women, and all sentient beings living within one hundred years of the extinction of the three treasures—all beings are included by the Vow [to save the] “sentient beings of the ten quarters.”²⁰

Compared to persons living during the time of the extinction of the three treasures, the people of Hōnen's era might be considered to be almost “Buddha-like.” Persons in the age of the extinction of the three treasures would have life spans of ten years. They would not even hear of the names of the three learnings—precepts, meditation and wisdom. In the passage above, however, Hōnen continues by stating that all will be saved.

Persons who have doubts as to whether their attainment of birth is settled, even though they say the nembutsu, do not know that the Primal Vow was established so as not to exclude either good or evil [persons].²¹

He explains that those who harbor doubt, thinking that their attainment of birth is unsettled, fail to understand that the true purport of the Primal Vow's salvation is not to exclude either good or evil persons.

As we have seen above, Hōnen's view of human beings involves a great variety of expressions. Hōnen would, on occasion, emphasize that the Path of Sages means that one attains wisdom and becomes free from birth-and-death, whereas on the Pure Land Path one returns to one's foolish self and thereby attains birth in the Land of Utmost Bliss. He would describe the foolish person as one who is dull and of inferior wisdom, one who hears and understands little, or one who violates the precepts or is without precepts. He saw the foolish being as “the person burdened with extreme evil.” Hōnen referred to himself as “Hōnen the fool, who has committed the ten evil acts.”²² When we reflect on these points, we see that the notion that “the good person is born; how much more so is the evil person,” purportedly transmitted orally in the tradition, is present in Hōnen's view of human beings. It is reflected in his words, “taking the evil person as the model,” and “taking as its object the salvation of the evil person.”

However, although Hōnen's view of human beings had as its objective the salvation of the evil person, he did not consider all humans to be evil persons. Further, he saw a variety of differences among evil persons. In the early stages of the last dharma-age and the age of the extinction of the dharma, there would be differences in the capacities of beings and also in the kinds of beings making up the nine grades. Hōnen, moreover, taught

the dharma in accordance with the capacities of his listeners. He taught of birth through the nembutsu, using prudent care not to use expressions that might encourage his followers to commit or tolerate evil. He strove to avoid teaching in a way that would invite false understanding; from the pragmatic perspective, he employed a variety of modes of teaching.²³

III. DESISTING FROM COMMITTING EVIL ACTS

Hōnen's deep self-reflection led him to a direct disclosure of his own nature with such expressions as, "How pitiful! How pitiful! What can we do? What can we do? People like us have no capacity to practice the three-fold learning of precepts, meditation, and wisdom"; "I am Hōnen, who has committed the ten evil acts; I am Hōnen the fool"; "The Master Hōnen stated, 'I am a person lacking in wisdom. I am a violator of the precepts'."²⁴ Hōnen deeply probed into his own foolishness and, for that very reason, was capable of clarifying the salvation of such a person.

Hōnen was not the only Pure Land master to have done so. Among the masters whose teachings preceded him, T'an-luan, Tao-ch'ō, Shan-tao, Genshin and others also sought to clarify the salvation of the ordinary, foolish person through penetrating and profound insight into both human nature and the nature of their own selves. For instance, in the section on the lowest grade of beings in his *Kuan wu-liang-shou ching shu* (*Commentary on the Sutra on the Contemplation of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life*), Shan-tao explicates the salvation of persons who cannot help but commit evil offenses through their lives. He describes such persons as "ordinary beings of foolishness and evil."²⁵

Further, the passage of the Eighteenth Vow in the *Wu-liang-shou ching* (*Larger Sutra of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life*) states, "Excluded are those who commit the five grave offenses and those who slander the right dharma."²⁶ There have been exhaustive inquiries into the meaning of this "exclusion clause," particularly into how it might relate to the section on the lowest level of birth for the lowest grade of beings in the *Kuan wu-liang-shou ching* (*Contemplation Sutra*).²⁷ Hōnen's examination of that sutra passage focuses attention on the salvation of persons who commit the five grave offenses. In his *Kangyōshaku* (*Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra*), he provides this definition:

Persons attaining the lowest level of birth for the lowest grade of beings: This refers to persons who commit the five grave offenses.²⁸

Hōnen then provides a faithful interpretation of the sutra passage. He states that, by reciting the nembutsu, sentient beings, who repeatedly

perform karmic actions of non-good and receive unending suffering through many kalpas, are able to remove the karmic sins that would bind them to samsaric existence for 800,000 kalpas. Upon their death, they will be greeted by the assembly of sages and be born transformed within a lotus blossom.

In a later discussion of the various roots of good of both meditative and non-meditative acts, he considers the passage, "each ray of light shines universally upon the worlds of the ten quarters," from the ninth contemplation (contemplation on the true body) of the sutra, and concludes that it supports the idea of birth through the nembutsu. Hōnen attributes to that passage a three-fold significance: equality, Primal Vow, and close karmic connections. Equality reveals the principle of non-discrimination among all persons who are illuminated by the light that takes in and holds beings. Based on this, Hōnen then elucidates the salvation of persons who commit the ten evil acts, violate the precepts and commit the five grave offenses.

The Sutra on the Contemplation of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life states that [Amida's light] illuminates not only persons who commit the lighter offenses of the ten evil acts or violating the precepts, but also those who commit the heavier five grave offenses.²⁹

Hōnen finds the basis for their salvation in the *Contemplation Sutra's* teaching of the lowest level of birth for persons in the lowest grade of being. Elsewhere, he also discusses the salvation of those who commit the five grave offenses, such as in this passage from the *Ōjō taiyōshō* (*Record of the main essentials for birth*),

[Birth] depends simply on whether or not one entrusts in the Buddha's Vow, with no distinction made between the goodness and evil of practitioners. It is also taught that even those who commit the five grave offenses or the ten evil acts will realize birth upon even one calling or ten callings of the nembutsu Persons who commit the five grave offenses are included among those beings who will attain birth. When we realize how much more this would be true for those who commit lighter offenses or for good persons, [then we would know that] no one is without the capacity to realize birth.³⁰

Here, he views the five grave offenses as the most serious offenses. Thus, the salvation of those who commit the five grave offenses would imply that those who commit lighter offenses and, of course, good persons will also be saved. His central position can be found in the words, "no one is without the capacity to realize birth." That is, Hōnen teaches the salvation of all

persons by establishing first that those who commit the five grave offenses are the objects of salvation, which by implication would include those who commit less serious offenses as well. This is similar to the stance taken by Hōnen in this passage, which we have already seen above,

Even though we have entered the last dharma-age, one hundred years have not yet passed; even though our karmic evil is deep, we have not yet committed the five grave offenses.³¹

Although Hōnen recognized the salvation of those who commit the five grave offenses, it does not mean that he gave simple approval to those who would commit such serious offenses. Rather, it might be said that Hōnen was emphasizing how the five grave offenses ought not readily be committed.

Question: Since the Primal Vow does not exclude evil persons, should one intentionally commit evil acts as one pleases?

Answer: Although the Buddha does not abandon evil persons, one who intentionally commits evil acts as one pleases is not a disciple of the Buddha. All of the Buddha's teachings [instruct beings] to desist from committing evil acts. Those completely unable to desist from doing evil are instructed to say the nembutsu and extinguish all of their sins. None of the Buddha's teachings state that beings should simply commit evil acts As you come to understand the Primal Vow, which does not abandon even the evil person, then more and more you will feel shame and lament before the Buddha's wisdom. If you receive the compassion of your father and mother, but engage in evil acts, even as your mother and father might do, would your mother and father rejoice over that? [No,] they would lament, yet not abandon you; they would pity you, yet detest your actions. The Buddha is just like this.³²

This rather long passage is easy to understand, and it skillfully explains the meaning of the salvation of the evil person. Hōnen does not give simple approval to the committing of evil acts. The often-held view that "committing evil does not hinder the Vow" does not constitute a true understanding of the Buddha's heart of great compassion. Hōnen states that, although the Buddha saves the evil person, the Buddha laments and detests that person's evil actions. Even though one who aspires for birth might know of the Primal Vow, which does not abandon the evil person, one becomes ashamed of and laments one's own evil acts in light of the Tathagata's wisdom. What Hōnen emphasizes here is the notion of desisting from evil. Despite the existence of the Primal Vow of great compassion, he does not permit one to presume upon the Vow.

IV. HŌNEN'S MENTION OF THE SALVATION OF THOSE WHO COMMIT THE OFFENSE OF SLANDERING THE RIGHT DHARMA

We will next examine the manner in which Hōnen mentions the salvation of those who commit the offense of slandering the right dharma. Let us look at this very brief discussion.

The Vow does not discriminate against persons who commit heavy sins or the five grave offenses; nor does it reject women or those lacking the seeds of Buddhahood. Practice is one calling or ten callings.³³

Here he explains that, beside those who commit the five grave offenses, the Vow also saves women and those lacking the seeds to attain Buddhahood. In this discussion, Hōnen cites a passage from Shan-tao's *Fa-shih tsan* (*Hymns of the Nembutsu Liturgy*), which discusses practitioners of the nembutsu whose minds are poisoned with malice, who cleverly engage in deception and slander, who damage the exclusive practice of the nembutsu, and who perform other acts of evil. Such persons, he says, are known as "icchāntika," whose eyes of Buddha-nature are closed and who have lost the seeds of good. He then continues by pointing out that these persons will suffer in the three lowest realms of samsaric existence for endless kalpas, surpassing in the number of dust particles in the continent, as a result of their slander of the nembutsu. In contrast, Hōnen states that beings who entrust in the Primal Vow will go to attain the highest level of birth for the highest grade of beings in the Land of Utmost Bliss, and then return to this world to perform the activity of guiding sentient beings who are lacking in trust.

Know that [those who entrust in the Vow] will realize the highest level of birth for the highest grade of beings in the Land of Utmost Bliss. Upon realizing enlightenment, they will return to samsaric existence to practice the roots of good so that persons who slander the nembutsu and are without trust [may go to be born].³⁴

It is not easy to commit the offense of destroying or slandering the teaching of the nembutsu. Thus, Hōnen emphasizes that such persons who do not entrust in or who slander the dharma will be saved by the compassionate activity of bodhisattvas in the aspect of the return to this world, which will produce in them thoughts of their mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, or relatives from the past. He discusses the way in which one

should respond to persons who slander the teaching of the nembutsu, explaining that ultimately such persons will be saved.

In the *Ōjō taiyōshō*, Hōnen refers to Shan-tao's interpretation of the deep mind of the *Contemplation Sutra*. Hōnen defines deep mind to mean that one deeply trusts, without any doubt, that the Primal Vow rejects no one who commits evil acts, and that one will become settled in birth with even a single calling of the Name. Here, he provides a concrete description of "all persons who commit evil acts" by referring to a passage from Shan-tao's *Wang-sheng-li tsan* (*Hymns of Birth in the Pure Land*),

In the section on the lowest level of birth for the lowest grade of beings in the *Contemplation Sutra*, it is taught that even persons who commit the ten evil acts and the five grave offenses will attain birth by calling the nembutsu even once or even ten times. The offenses of those who commit the ten evil acts and the five grave offenses are said to include greed, anger, the four serious offenses, stealing from the sangha, slandering the right dharma, and failing to repent one's previous faults. These offenses portray the karmic evil of our present age.³⁵

In other words, those who slander the right dharma are included among persons who commit karmic offenses.³⁶ Hōnen then goes on to clarify the salvation of beings of such varying capacities by citing this passage from the same section of the *Wang-sheng-li tsan*:

He quickly meets a good teacher who guides him to birth, and immediately says the Name of that Buddha exclusively. Transformed Buddhas and bodhisattvas come and call out to him, and in that moment he thinks [on them] and enters the treasure lotus.³⁷

Although the issue Hōnen is addressing here is that of salvation at the moment of death, he is also emphasizing the equality of the Primal Vow's salvation by revealing the breadth of the inclusiveness of Amida's Vow and the length of its reach. By raising the heaviness of karmic sins, it encompasses lightness; by taking into account those distant from the dharma, it includes those who are close; and by pointing out those who are born later, it embraces those born before.

Shan-tao's commentary on the mind of deep trust, or, belief as to the nature of beings elucidates the capacities of beings who commit karmic sins. Citing from the *Wang-sheng-li tsan*, Hōnen points out the offenses of the ten evil acts, five grave offenses, four serious offenses, stealing from the sangha, and slandering the right dharma. In his view, the salvation of beings who commit such acts takes place through the working of the Primal

Vow. In the *Sanbukyō tai'i* Hōnen offers another interpretation of the mind of deep trust, citing the following passage from Shan-tao.

Shan-tao's *Commentary* states:

"Since the beginningless past down to this present existence, sentient beings such as yourselves have, with physical, verbal, and mental acts, committed all the ten transgressions, the five grave offenses, and the four serious offenses. You have slandered the dharma, lacked of the seed of Buddhahood, violated the precepts, destroyed right views and so on. [You have committed these acts] against all others, whether ordinary beings or sages, and the retribution for these acts has yet to be eliminated or exhausted. This karmic evil will bind you to the three realms and the evil courses. How is it possible that, by performing meritorious deeds and saying the nembutsu for but one lifetime, you will attain the undefiled land of no-birth and realize the stage of nonretrogression forever?"

Answer: The teachings and practices of all the Buddhas outnumber even particles of grains of sand [They include] a thousand differences and myriad variations. How much more so is this with the inconceivable power of the Buddha-dharma! Does it not benefit us in a variety of ways? ³⁸

Here, a question is posed: How could one who commits the karmic sin of slandering the dharma and who lacks the seeds of Buddhahood be able to attain enlightenment by performing meritorious deeds and saying the nembutsu for but one lifetime? In response, Hōnen points out that, since the Buddhas' teachings are infinite and multifarious, and possess inconceivable power, they bring about a variety of benefits. He explains that the Name, "A-mi-da," is endowed with the innermost truth possessed by the Tathagatas, their externally exercised virtues, and the exceptionally profound teachings with virtues more numerous than the sands of the Ganges River. What Hōnen has developed here is a theory of salvation in which the purport of Amida's Vow is to teach beings that the Buddha will come to greet those who deeply entrust in his teaching and recite the nembutsu.

In this way, Hōnen first accepts Shan-tao's interpretation, and then further explains the salvation of those who commit the offense of slandering the right dharma. Finally, he cleverly sets out to clarify the working of the nembutsu using the metaphor of a medicine.

It is like a medicinal compound prepared from many plants and other medications. An ailing person knows about the medicine, but not about the percentages of the medicinal ingredients, or what

medicinal grasses are mixed into it. Nevertheless, all illness will be cured by this medicine.³⁹

In his text, *Amidakyōshaku (Commentary on the Amida Sutra)*,⁴⁰ Hōnen provides an interpretation of the final passage in the *Amida Sutra*, which states,

When the Buddha delivered this sutra, Śāriputra and all the monks, together with beings of the whole world, including devas, humans and asuras, rejoiced at what they had heard and reverently accepted it. Having worshipped him, they departed.⁴¹

The words, “rejoiced at what they had heard and reverently accepted it,” he states, mean that beings hear the teaching of birth through the nembutsu and do not slander it. Rather, they deeply accept and believe in it. Persons lacking in trust—who hear and slander the teaching of birth through the nembutsu—are persons of extreme evil who lack the seeds for attaining Buddhahood. Hōnen continues by citing a passage from Shan-tao’s *Fashih tsan*,⁴² which declares that various teachings exist in the world of the five defilements, yet none surpasses the teaching of birth in the Land in the Western quarter through the nembutsu. In this way, he urges beings to turn about at heart and aspire to be born in the Pure Land.

Hōnen further states that persons of doubt and slander are persons born blind to enlightenment, who lack the seeds of Buddhahood. In destroying the sudden teaching, they sink forever in delusion, and will be unable to free themselves from the three lowest realms of samsaric existence, even though they may pass through kalpas as numerous as dust particles in the continent. He urges the members of the great assembly of disciples to repent their sins of having destroyed the dharma during many lives and worlds, thereby to turn about at heart and aspire for birth in the Pure Land. Relying on Shan-tao’s passage, Hōnen urges practitioners to stop doubting the teaching of birth through the nembutsu, and reverently accept it. In other words, by stating that persons of doubt and slander are persons of extreme evil, who lack the seeds of Buddhahood, Hōnen admonishes them from engaging in such acts. At the same time, he urges them to turn about at heart and aspire to be born in the Pure Land.

We have presented some of the textual materials that mention Hōnen’s stance regarding the salvation of those who commit the offense of slandering the right dharma and those lacking the seed for the attainment of Buddhahood. We have observed his strong warning against committing the offense of slandering the right dharma, as well as his stance that even persons who have slandered the dharma can be saved if they take refuge in the teaching of the nembutsu. We have also seen that Hōnen’s view was based in the writings of Shan-tao. It is interesting to note, however, that

Hōnen does not cite those passages in which Shan-tao most clearly sets forth the notion of the salvation of those who slander the dharma or those who lack the seeds for Buddhahood. That is, he makes no reference to the section on the lowest level of birth for the lowest grade of beings in the *Kuan wu-liang-shou ching shu*, or to the *Fa-shih tsan* passage, "When persons who slander the dharma or persons lacking the seeds of Buddhahood turn about at heart, they will all go [to be born]."⁴³

Shan-tao distinguished between persons who had not yet committed the offense of slandering the right dharma and those who already had done so. The Buddha's mind of great compassion admonishes those who had not committed the offense, he explained, even while it embraces those who already have done so. Hōnen clearly inherited this position from Shan-tao, albeit apparently based upon passages other than the two mentioned above; but he does not offer any further explanation of it.⁴⁴

Hōnen's understanding of the Eighteenth Vow's exclusion clause, "Excluded are those who commit the five grave offenses and those who slander the right dharma," is not clearly known. During the development of the Pure Land teachings in India, China and Japan, the clause had been studied with great interest. Yet Hōnen's texts make virtually no mention of it. Nor does he explain how it relates to the salvation of those in the lowest level of birth of persons in the lowest grade of being (as set forth in the *Contemplation Sutra*), persons who commit the ten evil acts, or persons who commit the five grave offenses.

The *Hyakuyonjūgokajō mondō* (*One hundred forty-five questions and answers*) does offer the following reference, in the form of a question and answer, to the exclusion clause.

Are the five grave offenses and ten evil acts extinguished with one calling?

Answer: Without a doubt.

It is said that the offense of slandering the right dharma greatly exceeds that of the five grave offenses. Is this true?

Answer: One should not even consider [committing] that [offense].⁴⁵

These passages are perhaps too concise, and it is difficult to understand what they mean. The words, "One should not even consider that," seem to imply that, even as Hōnen answers questions pertaining to the relative seriousness and lightness of the offenses of slandering the right dharma and committing the five grave offenses, he is also instructing persons not to commit the act of slandering the dharma. The passages do not seem to say much more than that. Here, we can see how fully conscious Hōnen was of the offense of slandering the right dharma and how concerned he was about warning practitioners against committing such an act.

Even though Hōnen often cited the Eighteenth Vow as an attested passage, he usually omitted the exclusion clause from it. The clause is cited in only two places: as part of the passage on the fulfillment of the Eighteenth Vow in his *Muryōjukyōshaku* (*Commentary on the Sutra of Immeasurable Life*), and as part of the Vow passage in the *Tozanjō*. Even in those cases, he does not mention his reason for citing the exclusion clause.⁴⁶ For instance, in the *Muryōjukyōshaku*, he simply states that the passage on the fulfillment of the Eighteenth Vow contains three principles: (1) the purport of the sutra passage, (2) the meaning of once-calling and ten-callings differs from the teachings of the various masters, and (3) the clause that, “excluded are those who commit the five grave offenses.” Each of them, he states, explains the single practice of the nembutsu and clarifies the notion of birth in the Pure Land. Hōnen, however, does not explain the reason why the exclusion clause clarifies the teaching of birth through the nembutsu. It might have been that he accepted Shan-tao’s understanding that the exclusion clause contains a sense of both admonishment and inclusion (as we have seen above), reading into it the idea that the mind of great compassion ultimately guides beings to attain birth through the nembutsu. However, his manner of presentation is too concise, and it is quite difficult to understand what he means.

We have seen that Hōnen taught the salvation of those who slander the right dharma and those who lack the seed for the attainment of Buddhahood. What is the reason then that he makes virtually no reference to the exclusion clause of the Eighteenth Vow? I will now consider what that reason might have been, as we seek to clarify Hōnen’s view of human beings found in both his religious instructions and the *Senjakushū*.

V. HŌNEN’S REASON FOR NOT MENTIONING THE EXCLUSION CLAUSE

At the outset of the Chapter on the Two Gates of the *Senjakushū*, Hōnen quotes from the *An-lo chi* (*Passages on the Land of Happiness*)⁴⁷ of Tao-ch’o. During the last dharma-age, Tao-ch’o states, the Pure Land Path is the only one through which beings will be able to pass in order to attain enlightenment. In the world of the five defilements during the last dharma-age, sentient beings of inferior capacities will not be able to understand the profound teaching. Hōnen also cites the well-known phrase, “When we ponder the evil that people do and the offenses that they commit, are they any different than violent winds and driving rain?” Near the conclusion of this chapter, Hōnen also cites a passage from the *Shi-fang yao-chüeh* (*Essentials for Rebirth in the Western Land*), which states,

As I reflect, we have been born at the end of the semblance dharma-age; the sage [Śākyamuni] departed [from this world] long ago. The path we have received is that of the three vehicles; yet, we are not able to attain enlightenment upon it Those whose hearts are foolish and whose practices shallow will likely sink into the dark realms of existence. Thus, we must without fail remove ourselves far away from this saḥā world, so that our hearts may dwell in the land of purity.⁴⁸

Through this passage, Hōnen explains that “those whose hearts are foolish and whose practices shallow” should aspire without fail to be born in the Pure Land. In this way, Hōnen explicates the salvation of persons of inferior capacities living in this evil world of the five defilements. We must note that the *Senjakushū* does not discuss the idea of the last dharma-age through a direct citation of the *Mappō tōmyōki* (*Lamp for the Last Dharma-Age*). Instead, we need to look to Hōnen's religious instructions to find reference to Saichō's work. For instance, in the *Jūnikajō mondō* (*Questions and answers in twelve sections*), Hōnen states,

As the Master Dengyō (Saichō) writes in the *Mappō tōmyōki*, can we determine whether we observe or violate the precepts? Because of the Primal Vow, which was established for the sake of ordinary foolish beings, we should quickly, quickly say the Name.⁴⁹

In this world of the last dharma-age, there is no need for us to consider whether we observe the precepts or violate them. For that reason Hōnen emphasizes the salvation of ordinary, foolish beings.

In the Chapter on the Primal Vow, which is the third chapter of the *Senjakushū*, Hōnen presents two virtues—superiority and ease of performance—possessed by the practice of the nembutsu selected in the Primal Vow. In this chapter he cites a passage from Shan-tao's *Wang-sheng-li-tsan* (*Hymns of Birth in the Pure Land*), in order to consider why the Bodhisattva Dharmākara selected the easy practice of the nembutsu.

The burdens of sentient beings are heavy and the objects they perceive are faint; their minds are lax, their senses uncontrollable, and their spirits fly about. Hence, it is difficult for them to fulfill their practices of contemplation.⁵⁰

Burdened with many hindrances, the minds of sentient beings are constantly agitated, and it is difficult for them to perfect any contemplative practice. Here, Hōnen once again makes it clear that Dharmākara, driven by the compassion of equality, selected the single practice of saying the nembutsu for the sake of those who are destitute and troubled, those who

are dull and of inferior wisdom, those of little learning or knowledge, and those who violate the precepts or are without precepts. He explains that it is the easiest of practices, which anyone is able to perform.

When we consider the development of the idea of the nembutsu from Shan-tao to Hōnen, we see that both masters explicated saying the Name as “easy practice.” However, the discussion of the “essence” of the nembutsu (that is, its virtue of superiority) represented a stance unique to Hōnen. Some regard this as the unique character of Hōnen’s notion of the nembutsu selected in the Primal Vow,⁵¹ and certainly, the virtue of superiority could be considered as such. However, at the same time, we cannot separate the virtue of superiority from the ease of practice. That is to say, Hōnen makes clear that the practice that anyone is capable of reciting is—for that reason—the most superior of practices. Thus, by coupling the virtues of superiority and ease, Hōnen is able to talk about the practice selected in the Primal Vow. Saying the nembutsu—the most superlative of practices—was selected for the sake of persons driven away from the Buddhist path by the circumstances of their lives, and who thus are without any karmic connections to the teachings. It was selected for those incapable of performing the miscellaneous practices, and who thus had not in the past found acceptance within the Buddhist teachings.

It is believed that Hōnen produced the *Muryōjukyōshaku* prior to the *Senjakushū*. In that text as well, the two ideas of superiority versus inferiority and difficulty versus ease of practice are presented as reasons for the selection of the single practice of saying the nembutsu. The analysis of the notion of superior versus inferior differs little from the words in the *Senjakushū*. The issue of difficulty versus ease, however, is discussed in greater detail in the *Muryōjukyōshaku*. Hōnen begins by stating that the essence of the minds of all the Buddhas is compassion; thus they embrace all beings universally. He presents the teachings of the Shingon, Busshin (Zen), and Hokke (Tendai) schools of Buddhism, all of which teach of the compassion of equality. He declares, however, that through those teachings the great masters of each school might be able to attain birth, but that it would be impossible for other persons to do so. On the other hand, the vow of birth through the nembutsu includes all beings; thus the great masters of the various Buddhist schools in China and Japan have all aspired for birth in the Pure Land.

Concretely speaking, if alms-giving were the practice set out in the Primal Vow, then Śilāditya alone would be capable of attaining birth. None of the poor and destitute people would be saved. If building stupas were the practice prescribed in the Primal Vow, then King Aśoka would be saved, but none of those suffering from hardship and strife could receive salvation. In meticulously ordered fashion, he elucidates the Primal Vow, which clarifies the birth of all persons, those who are poor and destitute, those of meager means and in hardship, those whose senses are shallow

and whose passions abound, those of inferior capacities, and those who live as lay householders.⁵² In his conclusion, Hōnen states that the vow of birth through the nembutsu makes no issue with regard to those with wisdom and those without, those who observe precepts and those who violate them, those who hear and understand little, or those living as lay persons in worldly life. The vow establishes a practice that is easy to recite and birth that is easy to attain. Finally, he cites Fa-chao's *Wu-hui fa-shih tsan*, as he concludes with the statement that the Buddha embraces all beings with the compassion of equality.

Hōnen emphasizes the compassion of equality of the Buddha's heart and mind. By mentioning the names of existing Buddhist schools and individuals, he emphasizes that salvation is not limited to a chosen few. Rather, he asserts that salvation includes those people who had been traditionally perceived as having no karmic connections to the Buddhist teachings. In this way, he takes great pains to explain the issue of difficulty versus ease of practice in order to present a salvation for all persons. Hōnen devotes further, organized discussion to this point in the *Senjakushū*. Thus, we can understand how much care Hōnen paid to his attempts to give expression to the salvation of great compassion.

Another point must be noted. It is known that Hōnen's discussion of the idea of difficulty versus ease of practice was influenced by Fa-chao's *Wu-hui fa-shih tsan*, which was cited as an attesting passage at the end of the *Muryōjukyōshaku*. The passage was originally a verse by Tz'u-min, which Fa-chao cites in his text. For Hōnen, the meaning of the passage cited from Tz'u-min was identical to that of Fa-chao. According to it, the Primal Vow of Amida Buddha makes no discrimination between the poor and the rich or wellborn, or between the inferior and the highly gifted; it does not choose the learned and those upholding pure precepts; nor does it reject those who violate the precepts and whose evil karma is profound. Simply by causing beings to turn about and abundantly say the nembutsu, it can make bits of rubble change into gold.

The content of this *Muryōjukyōshaku* passage is expressed in terms of the salvation of "those who are dull and of inferior wisdom, those who violate the precepts or are without precepts" in the Chapter on the Primal Vow in the *Senjakushū*. There, it is stated that "those who violate the precepts and whose evil karma is profound" are like bits of tile and rubble, which become changed into gold.⁵³ In this way, Hōnen explains that the basis for clarifying the salvation of all beings lies in the Amida Buddha's compassionate mind of equality. At the same time, he reveals the significance of Amida's establishment of a separate vow for the salvation of people who are like bits of tile and rubble. Hōnen clarifies the salvation of persons who are like bits of tile and rubble—those who break precepts and whose evil karma is profound. This is the manner in which the *Senjakushū* expounds the salvation of the evil person.

As mentioned above, on those occasions when Hōnen cited the passage on the Eighteenth Vow as an attesting passage, he usually omitted the exclusion clause. In those cases where he included the exclusion clause in his quotation of the Eighteenth Vow, such as in the *Tozanjō*, it was usually followed by a citation of Shan-tao's interpretive rendering of the gist of the vow. Hōnen made no other mention of this issue. In the Chapter on the Primal Vow and other passages in the *Senjakushū* as well, Hōnen cites the passages on the Eighteenth Vow and the fulfillment of the Eighteenth Vow. However, in both cases the exclusion clause is omitted.

Having declared, "I rely solely on Shan-tao, as my one master," Hōnen naturally must have found his view of the Primal Vow strongly influenced by Shan-tao. We have seen above how Hōnen occasionally adopted Shan-tao's interpretive rendering of the gist of the vow. Yet, in the *Senjakushū* Hōnen does not cite any of Shan-tao's adapted readings of the Primal Vow. His discussion of the vow in terms of the practice forming the cause of birth, however, shows a clear acceptance of Shan-tao's thought. That is to say, Hōnen makes it clear, in accordance with Shan-tao, that the exclusive practice of saying the nembutsu is in itself the practice selected in the Primal Vow. This is the central theme of the *Senjakushū*, and thus it is taken up at the outset of the text. Since sentient beings of the ten quarters constitute the object of salvation through the Primal Vow, Hōnen seeks to clarify the equanimity of salvation in his discussion of the two virtues of the nembutsu: superiority and ease of practice. That point is clarified in the later Chapter on Praise for the Nembutsu of the *Senjakushū* along with his discussion of the salvation of the evil person.⁵⁴

As mentioned above, Hōnen discusses the salvation of those who commit the five grave offenses in the section of the lowest level of birth by persons in the lowest grade of being of his text, *Kangyōshaku*.⁵⁵ In that context, he takes the position that the extinguishing of heavy sins and offenses is possible only through the power of the nembutsu, and not through any other practice. This, he states, is the most superlative teaching of ultimate good for the sake of the lowest people of extreme evil. He then offers an illustration as further explanation. If the source of ignorance were an illness, he says, then one could never be cured without the medicine taken from the Mādhyamika storehouse. The five grave offenses constitute a serious illness, which can be cured only through the nembutsu, taken from the storehouse of miraculous medicines.

As proof, Hōnen cites from the *Rokuharamitsukyō*, taken from the second fascicle of the *Ben-kenmitsu-nikyōron* (*Commentary on the Esoteric and Exoteric Teachings*) of Kōbō Daishi (Kūkai).⁵⁶ There, the 84,000 Buddhist teachings are separated into five divisions: *sūtra*, *vinaya*, *abhidharma*, *prajñā-pāramitā*, and *dhāraṇī*. It is taught that each of these five kinds of teachings is expounded in accordance with the capacities of the beings. In particular, persons who have committed serious offenses—

beings of karmic evil, those who have committed the four serious offenses or the eight major sins, those who commit the five offenses that will cause them to suffer in Avīci Hell, those who slander the Mahāyāna sutras, and those who lack the seeds for attaining Buddhahood—such persons must rely upon the various *dhāraṇī-piṭaka* in order to extinguish quickly all of their sins, gain emancipation and attain nirvana. These five divisions of Buddhist teachings are further categorized in terms of “five tastes,” respectively: milk, cream, curdled milk, butter and clarified butter (*maṇḍa*). The *dhāraṇī* scriptures correspond to the taste of *maṇḍa*. In the final analysis, according to Kūkai, the *dhāraṇī* is the most superlative of all the Buddhist teachings, for it is able to eliminate all grave sins, bring all sentient beings to liberation from samsaric existence, and instantly cause them to realize the dharma-body of nirvana and utmost bliss. Essentially, the *Ben-kenmitsu-nikyōron*, and two of Kūkai’s other texts, *Himitsu-mandara-jūjūshin-ron* and *Hizō-hōyaku* together constitute his scriptural classification in terms of crosswise and lengthwise teachings. The *Nikyōron* establishes contrasts between the esoteric and exoteric teachings. By elucidating theories such as the Buddha-bodies, dharmic instruction, attainment of enlightenment, and dharma-body expositions, it declares the superior nature of Shingon esoteric teachings. In particular, the *dhāraṇī* scriptures are illustrated through the metaphor of the wondrous medicine of *maṇḍa*. By taking it, one can eliminate such heavy sins as the five grave offenses, slandering of the right dharma, and lacking the seeds for Buddhahood, and one will be able to attain the dharma-body of nirvana and utmost bliss.

Hōnen viewed the *dhāraṇī* teaching to be synonymous with the teaching of the nembutsu. He concludes,

Among these, the five offenses that cause beings to suffer in Avīci Hell correspond to the five grave offenses. Without the wondrous medicine of *maṇḍa*, the illness of these five offenses would be extremely difficult to cure. Know that the nembutsu is just like this. Among the teachings leading to birth, nembutsu *samādhi* is like a *dhāraṇī*; it is just like *maṇḍa*. Without the *maṇḍa*-like medicine of nembutsu *samādhi*, the illness of the five grave and heavy offenses would be extremely difficult to cure.⁵⁷

With this skillful citation of an attesting passage, Hōnen explicates the salvation of persons with heavy karmic sins through the working of the nembutsu. One point deserves special note. The *Ben-kenmitsu-nikyōron* elucidates a path to enlightenment after having first taken up persons who have committed various grave offenses: those who commit the four serious offenses or the eight major sins; those who commit the five offenses which cause them to suffer in Avīci Hell; those who slander the Mahāyāna sutras; and those who lack the seeds for attaining Buddhahood. It is very difficult

to teach the dharma to such persons and guide them to enlightenment. Hōnen, however, does not touch at all upon the offense of slandering the dharma or upon *icchantika*, who lack the seeds for attain Buddhahood. Instead, he points out that the five offenses that would cause one to suffer in Avīci Hell correspond to the five grave offenses. Thus, he only addresses the salvation of those who commit the five grave offenses through the nembutsu teaching. One would think that Hōnen would have discussed the nembutsu as a teaching of admonition and inclusion, as we have seen in Shan-tao's analysis of the *Contemplation Sutra's* section on the lowest level of birth among the lowest grade of beings, or in the context of the offense of slandering the right dharma and the five grave offenses, based on the *Fa-shih tsan*.⁵⁸ However, he does not touch upon them at all. Instead, he clarifies the salvation of persons who have committed heavy karmic sins, such as the five grave offenses, through the citation of passages from Kūkai's texts.

In his *Kangyōshaku*, Hōnen follows along with the sutra passages, and sets forth the salvation of those who have committed the five grave offenses in his commentary on the section on persons in the lowest grade of beings. In the *Senjakushū*, he adds further development to this notion of the salvation of persons who commit the five grave offenses in the Chapter on Praise of the Nembutsu. Again, he cites the *Ben-kenmitsu-nikyōron* as the authority to discuss the significance of the *dhāraṇī* scriptures. He argues that, compared to other practices, the nembutsu is inclusive of all practices; it is able to cure the sickness of the five grave offenses.

In this way, Hōnen explicated the salvation of a person who commits the ten evil acts and the five grave offenses, and he asserted by implication the notion that the evil person is the true object of the Primal Vow's salvation. In addition, he fully understood and inherited the import of Shan-tao's teaching that when persons who slander the right dharma and persons who lack the seeds to attain Buddhahood turn about at heart, they will also be included in salvation. Despite that, however, he did not mention the exclusion clause from the passage on the Primal Vow. Moreover, Hōnen neither cited nor commented on the various passages from Shan-tao's texts, which provide the clearest discussion of the inclusion of slanderers of the dharma or *icchantika*.

It is likely that Hōnen was quite careful in his interpretation and religious instructions regarding the offense of slandering the right dharma. If he had focused solely on those who slander the right dharma and actively argued for the inclusion of such persons, it might have encouraged misunderstanding of his position by those who were critical of other Buddhist schools and wished to recognize the nembutsu teaching alone. Or, he might have given credence to those people from outside the Pure Land path, who wished to denounce the nembutsu teaching for being non-Buddhistic. It might be said that, among the various repercussions that arose around

Hōnen's positions, the problem concerning those who slander the right dharma was one of the greatest issues. In this light, by inheriting the import of Shan-tao's thought, Hōnen could respond discreetly to the problem, while not having to argue affirmatively for the inclusion of those who commit the offense of slandering the right dharma. Therefore, Hōnen took careful note of those who slander the right dharma and made frequent mention of them.

Hōnen comments in this way on the passage from Shan-tao's *Fa-shih tsan*, which we mentioned above.

The time has come when the five defilements increase and those who doubt and revile [Amida's Vow] are numerous.
Both monks and lay people despise [the nembutsu] and refuse to listen [to the teaching].
When they see those who practice it, the poison of anger arises in them;
Hindering others in every way, they vie in causing harm.
Such people like these, who are born blind [to enlightenment] and lack the seeds to attain Buddhahood, destroy the sudden teaching, and thus forever sink [in transmigration].⁵⁹

For Hōnen, persons who look upon those who aspire for birth in the Pure Land and practice the nembutsu with thoughts of malice, prejudice and hatred are lacking the eyes of Buddha-nature—they are *icchantika*, who lack the seeds for the attainment of Buddhahood. Such persons will sink forever into the three evil courses; they will be unable to escape from this world of delusion, even if they were to pass through kalpas as numerous as the motes of dust in the great continent. At the conclusion of this letter, Hōnen does not himself force the nembutsu upon those who slander it. Rather, he writes that such persons will be guided by bodhisattvas in the aspect of their return to this world, who will take such persons in and instruct them, while making them think on their own relatives.

There were many people who slandered the nembutsu, each of them committing the offense of slandering the right dharma. However, here Hōnen's sentiment is that enmity not be directed against such persons. In the *Amidakyōshaku* he comments on the words, "rejoiced at what they had heard and reverently accepted it," from the conclusion of the *Amida Sutra* in order to state that persons who hear the teaching of birth through the nembutsu and slander it are persons of extreme evil—*icchantika*, persons lacking the seeds for attaining Buddhahood.⁶⁰ He also mentions that there were people in various locations, such as Tennōji, who were critical of the nembutsu *samādhi*. In the Chapter on Entrusting the Nembutsu in the *Senjakushū*, the same *Fa-shih tsan* passage is cited. Here, Hōnen states that there were many persons in the evil world of the five defilements who

slandered, criticized and attacked the nembutsu teaching. In spite of that, he emphasizes, the followers in the great assembly should, with like-mindedness, repent the conditions that have brought about such slandering of the dharma, and take refuge in the teaching of the nembutsu.⁶¹

In his *Kuan wu-liang-shou ching shu*, Shan-tao teaches that one should believe deeply in the *Contemplation Sutra*. During his time, persons of all different understandings and practices, as well as divergent learning, views and attachments, everywhere filled the worlds of the ten quarters. They quoted from the sutras and commentaries and rejected the teaching of birth through the nembutsu. Despite that, however, Shan-tao teaches that persons of the nembutsu should not waver or be disturbed. Hōnen, in texts such as *Ōjōtaiyōshō*, cites Shan-tao's words and interprets them in an easily understandable way. No matter what sort of criticism or slander one might be subject to, he says, one should not doubt the nembutsu for even one moment.⁶²

In the concluding passage of the *Senjakushū*, Hōnen states that, since he had been asked to write the text by Kujō Kanezane, he did not even consider his own inability to do so. Having compiled the essential passages and presented the essential meaning of the nembutsu, he concludes his work with the words,

I humbly ask that, after you have once deigned to read this collection, you hide it in the base of a wall and not leave it out before a window, for I fear that that it might cause one who wishes to destroy the Buddhist teachings to fall into evil ways.⁶³

Here Hōnen's deep feelings are well displayed. Hōnen fully predicted that the publication of the *Senjakushū* would produce a great deal of criticism and censure, and that it would also give rise to the offense of slandering the right dharma. Eventually, voices calling for the suppression of the nembutsu would gradually be raised, just as Hōnen had feared. In time, those voices brought about the Jōgen prohibition of the nembutsu movement. In Kanto, Nichiren launched his criticism of the exclusive practice of the nembutsu. He denounced Hōnen for teaching people to "reject, close, seal off, and abandon" any teachings and practices other than the nembutsu. Nichiren declared that the practice of the nembutsu would cause persons to fall into Avīci Hell, for the exclusive practice of the nembutsu itself was a slandering of the right Buddhist teachings.⁶⁴ Other works, such as Myōe's *Zaijarin*, also criticized Hōnen's published doctrines as non-Buddhistic. Finally, after Hōnen's death a variety of divergent views and disputes arose among his followers. Some of the issues involved the problem of once-calling versus many-calling, and whether or not it would be possible to attain birth through practices other than the nembutsu.

The path of the exclusive practice of the nembutsu involves a life of severe choices. The nembutsu selected in the Primal Vow brought about a hundred eighty degree revolution of traditional Buddhist views. For that reason, Hōnen was able to foresee the arising of much slander of the right dharma and he was deeply worried about that very prospect. Having stated that evil persons are saved by the Primal Vow of great compassion, and that slanderers of the right dharma are also included within that salvation, he urged people not to understand this teaching superficially or incorrectly. People should never presume on the great compassionate mind of the Primal Vow; nor should they ever accept evil acts or slandering of the right dharma; and they should never criticize or do harm to the teaching of birth through the nembutsu. Certainly, Hōnen's thought involves the notion that we should fully understand just how grave an offense slandering the right dharma really is.

Translated by David Matsumoto

NOTES

1. This article originally appeared under the title, "Hōnen ni okeru gyaku hō no sukui no mondai," in the journal *Ryūkoku daigaku ronshū* 434/435 (1999): pp. 1–22. Unless otherwise noted, the text of the article and all cited passages have been translated into English by David Matsumoto.
2. See Yata Ryōshō, "Akunin shōki setsu no seiritsu ni tsuite: (1) tokuni Hōnen to kanren shite," in *Shinshūgaku* 65 (1982): pp. 38–39.
3. "Dainibu: Daigobon *Hōnen Shōnin denki*" (hereinafter *Daigobon*) in Tōdō Kyōshun hakase koki kinenkai, ed., *Tōdō Kyōshun hakase koki kinen Jōdoshū tenseki kenkyū* (hereinafter, *Jōdoshū tenseki kenkyū*): *shiryōhen* (Kyoto: Dōbōsha, 1988), pp. 125–237.
4. Itō Yuishin, "*Hōnen Shōnin denki* (Daigobon) no seiritsu shiteki kōsatsu," in *Jōdoshū tenseki kenkyū: kenkyūhen*, pp. 281–282.
5. *Daigobon*, leaves 43 verso, and 44 recto, in *Jōdoshū tenseki kenkyū: shiryōhen*, pp. 213–214. See also, Ishii Kyōdō, ed., *Shōwa shinshū Hōnen Shōnin zenshū* (hereinafter *Hōnen zenshū*), (Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten, 1955), p. 454.
6. *Tannishō* (*A Record in Lament of Divergences*) in *Shinshū shōgyō zensho* (hereinafter *SSZ*), (Kyoto: Ōyagi Kōbundō, 1941), vol. 2, p. 775; also, The Shin Buddhism Translation Series, *The Collected Works of Shinran* (hereinafter *CWS*), (Kyoto: Jōdo Shinshū Hongwanji-ha, 1997), p. 663.
7. Mochizuki Shinkō, *Jōdokyō no kenkyū* (1930; reprint, Tokyo: Nihon Tosho Center, 1977).
8. Tsuboi has presented a number of articles on this issue. His view has been advanced in a recent article, "*Daigobon Hōnen Shōnin denki*, shoshū, *Sanjinryōken no koto*, ika *Nijūshichi hōgo* ni tsuite: toku ni akunin shōki setsu to sono jojutsusha ni kanshite," in *Jōdoshū tenseki kenkyū: kenkyūhen*, pp. 433–460.
9. *Daigobon*, leaf 35 recto and verso, in *Jōdoshū tenseki kenkyū: shiryōhen*, pp. 196–197. See also, *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 450.
10. A hymn by Tz'u-min, cited by Fa-chao in the *Wu-hui fa-shih tsan* (*Shorter Pure Land Liturgy of Nembutsu Chant in Five Stages*, in *Taishō*, vol. 47, no. 1983). This portion of the English translation has been taken from Shinran's *Yushinshō mon'i*, in *CWS*, p. 456.
11. *Daigobon*, leaf 36 recto and verso, in *Jōdoshū tenseki kenkyū: shiryōhen*, pp. 198–199. See also *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 451.
12. The passage, "That Buddha, in the causal stage, made the universal

Vow . . . ,” from the *Wu-hui fa-shih tsan* of Fa-chao, is actually from Tz’u-min’s *Pan-chou san-meī tsan* (*Hymns on the Samādhi of All Buddhas’ Presence*), a hymn cited by Fa-chao. See Jōdoshū shūten kankōkai, ed., *Jōdoshū zensho*, vol. 6 (Tokyo: Sankibō Busshorin, 1982), p. 686. Hōnen considers Tz’u-min’s passage to be that of Fa-chao himself. Hōnen’s citation omits the four lines, “Not rejecting those who do not perform Pure Land practices or the *icchāntika* of non-Buddhist paths; nor choosing those who perform practices over long periods of time or those who give rise to that mind for the first time today.” We must examine the question of whether he omitted these passages for some particular reason.

13. Hōnen, *Senjaku hongan nembutsu shū* (*Passages on the Nembutsu Selected in the Primal Vow*) in *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 320. See also *SSZ*, vol. 1, p. 945.

14. Shinran’s notion of the salvation of the evil person is explained in terms of the salvation of those who commit the five grave offenses, slander the right dharma, or those who lack the seed of Buddhahood (*icchāntika*) in sections in the general preface, commentary on the ocean of the one vehicle, and the latter portion of the Chapter on Shinjin in the *Kyōgyōshinshō* (*Collection of Passages Revealing the True Teaching, Practice, and Realization of the Pure Land Way*). It can also be seen in the writings of his later years. Hence, it was a position taken by Shinran throughout his lifetime. He also teaches that, “since the beginningless past, the multitudes of beings have been transmigrating in the ocean of ignorance, sinking aimlessly in the cycle of all forms of [false] existence.” (Chapter on Shinjin, in *SSZ*, vol. 2, p. 62; *CWS*, p. 98.) In other words, the entire existence of all human beings is evil.

15. *Daigobon*, leafs 34 recto and verso, and 35 recto, in *Jōdoshū tenseki kenkyū: shiryōhen*, pp. 194–196. See also *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 450.

16. *Jūni mondō* (*Twelve Questions and Answers*), in *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 639.

17. Hōnen, *Sanbukyō tai’i* (*Overall Significance of the Three Pure Land Sutras*), in *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 44. Recently, there have been advances in the bibliographic studies known as “Jōdoshū tenseki” (Pure Land school texts). There are differing theories concerning the formation of the *Sanbukyō tai’i*. Tsuboi Shun’ei raises questions as to whether or not the *Sanbukyō tai’i* transmitted Hōnen’s true intent. See Tsuboi Shun’ei, *Hōnen Jōdokyō no kenkyū: Dentō to jishō ni tsuite* (Tokyo: Ryūbunkan, 1982), pp. 170–188. Tōdō Kyōshun analyzes the text’s commentary on the sincere mind, pointing out that it contains a notion of “mental cultivation [polishing],” which Hōnen discussed early on. Thus, he sees the *Sanbukyō tai’i* as one of Hōnen’s early works. See Tōdō Kyōshun, *Hōnen Shōnin kenkyū* (Tokyo: Sankibō Busshorin, 1983), pp. 252–280. Kakehashi Jitsuen engages in a similar analysis of the commentary on the sincere mind and concludes that

the *Sanbukyō tai'i* is an important text in the development from Hōnen to Shinran of the notion of directing of virtue through Other Power. See Kakehashi Jitsuen, *Hōnen kyōgaku no kenkyū* (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshōdō, 1986), pp. 270–288. There remains a need for further studies on the question of the formation of this text.

18. Hōnen, *Ōjō taiyō shō* (*Record of the main essentials for birth*), in *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 61.

19. Translator's Note: The "five grave offenses" (Jpn. *gogyakuzai*) are considered to be so serious that the person committing even one of them would be condemned to suffer endless pain and suffering in hell. Traditionally, the five offenses have been considered to be: (1) killing one's mother; (2) killing one's father; (3) killing an *arhat*; (4) causing the body of a Buddha to bleed; and (5) bringing disharmony to the Buddhist sangha. The five offenses apparently take on a different character in the Mahāyāna tradition. See *CWS*, vol. 2, pp. 186–187.

20. *Jūni mondō*, in *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 638.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Translator's note: The "ten evil acts" (Jpn. *jūaku*) represent transgressions of ten Buddhist precepts against: (1) taking life; (2) stealing; (3) committing adultery; (4) lying; (5) using harsh language; (6) speaking in a way that causes enmity between persons; (7) idle talk; (8) greed; (9) anger; and (10) wrong views.

23. In fact, there are many interpretations of the place of "the evil person is the true object of salvation" within Hōnen's thought. Some of them, which I have introduced in an earlier article, include:

(1) It is not accepted as a stance taken by Hōnen. Tsuboi Shun'ei takes the position that it was actually a theory set forth by Ryūkan. See Tsuboi Shun'ei, *Hōnen Jōdokyō no kenkyū*, pp. 44–52.

(2) While the theory can be viewed as a position taken by Hōnen, it involves two meanings: "take evil as the right act and cast away good" and "take good as the right act and cast away evil." Opinions are divided as to how to view these two ideas. The former might be viewed as an attempt to make one's practice more thorough-going. See, for instance, Yata Ryōshō, "Akunin shōki setsu no seiritsu ni tsuite: (1) tokuni Hōnen to kanrenshite," in *Shinshūgaku* 65 (1982): pp. 35–56. Kakehashi Jitsuen makes the point that this notion forms the core of Hōnen's understanding of the Primal Vow. However, since it could easily become a pretext for engaging in licensed evil, Hōnen conferred this teaching orally only to those disciples capable of understanding its true meaning. See, Kakehashi Jitsuen, *Hōnen kyōgaku no kenkyū*, p. 322.

Shigematsu Akihisa believes that Hōnen never fully accepted the view that “the evil person is the object of salvation.” Rather, held in check by the traditional stance that “good is taken as the right act, while evil is cast away,” Hōnen was not able to cross over that final line. Shigematsu’s position can be found in his *Nihon Jōdokyō seiritsukatei no kenkyū: Shinran no shisō to sono genryū* (Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten, 1964).

(3) Shinran’s notion that “the evil person is the true object of the Vow” was anticipated by Hōnen’s interpretation. For examples of those adopting this view, see Kajimura Noboru, *Hōnen* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1970), pp. 215–217, and Takahashi Kōji, *Hōnen Jōdokyō no shomondai* (Tokyo: Sankibō Busshorin, 1980), p. 30. Fujimoto Kiyohiko says that the theory that “the evil person is the true object of salvation” has been espoused as the idea of Shinran. However, above and beyond that, it can be understood to have been a concrete and real religious ideal within Hōnen’s thought. Although Hōnen also taught that “good is to be taken as the right practice, while evil is to be cast aside,” this might be considered as a teaching geared to the capacities of the listener. Thus, it was based in secular ethics and morality. Fujimoto points out that all of this was concentrated in his teaching that “the evil person is the true object of salvation.” See Fujimoto, “Hōnen ni okeru akuninshōki no shisō,” in *Jōdoshū tenseki kenkyū: Kenkyūhen*, pp. 491–514.

24. *Shijūhachikan den* (Biography in Forty-eight Volumes), vol. 6, in *Hōnen zenshū*, pp. 493 and 752.

25. Shan-tao, *Kuan wu-liang-shou ching shu* (Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra), *Hsüan-i fen* (Chapter on the Essential Meaning of the Sūtra), in *SSZ*, vol. 1, p. 453.

26. *Wu-liang-shou ching* (Sutra of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life), in *SSZ*, vol. 1, p. 9. See also, *CWS*, p. 80.

27. For instance, Tamaki Kōshirō has engaged in a detailed study of the development of interpretation of the exclusion clause of the Eighteenth Vow, from the eightfold questions and answers in T’an-luan’s *Wang-sheng lun chu* (*SSZ*, vol. 1, pp. 308–9) to Shan-tao’s *San-shan i* (Chapter on the Meaning of Non-Meditative Practice) in the *Kuan wu-liang-shou ching shu* (*SSZ*, vol. 1, p. 555). See Tamaki, “Yuijo gogyaku no imi ni tsuite: Chūgoku, Nihon hen,” in *Tōbōgaku ronshū: Tōbōgakkai sōritsu yonjūssūnen kinen* (Tokyo: Tōbōgakkai, 1987): pp. 483–500, and “Yuijo gogyaku hihō shōbō no imi ni tsuite: Indo sōkatsuhēn,” in *Narita bukkyō kenkyūsho kiyō* 11 [*Tokubetsugō: Bukkyō shisōshi ronshū*] (1988): pp. 219–90.

28. *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 119.

29. *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 121.
30. *Ōjō taiyōshō*, in *Hōnen zenshū*, pp. 49–50.
31. *Ōjō taiyōshō*, in *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 61.
32. Hōnen, *Jūnikajō no mondō (Questions and Answers in Twelve Sections)*, *Hōnen zenshū*, pp. 679–680.
33. Hōnen, *Nembutsu ōjō yōgishō (Notes on the Essential Meaning of Birth through the Nembutsu)*, in *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 688.
34. *Kamakura ni’i no zenni e shinzuru gohenji*, in *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 530.
35. Shan-tao, *Wang-sheng-li tsan (Hymns of Birth in the Pure Land)*, in *SSZ*, vol. 1, p. 679. Cited in *Ōjō taiyōshō*, in *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 60.
36. This passage from the *Wang-sheng-li tsan* (*SSZ*, vol. 1, p. 679) is often cited in records of Hōnen’s religious instructions. It greatly influenced Hōnen’s thinking on the issue of the offense of slandering the right dharma. His use of the terms “slandering the dharma” and “destroying the dharma” in the sixteenth chapter of the *Senjakushū* (*SSZ*, vol. 1, p. 988) carries with it a strong sense of admonition against committing such acts.
37. *Wang-sheng-li tsan*, in *SSZ*, vol. 1, p. 679.
38. *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 37; cited in *CWS*, pp. 88–9.
39. *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 39.
40. *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 143.
41. *A-mi-t’o ching (Amida Sutra)*, in *SSZ*, p. 72. This English translation is from *The Smaller Sutra on Amitāyus*, Hisao Inagaki, *The Three Pure Land Sutras: A Study and Translation* (Kyoto: Nagata Bunshōdō, 1994), p. 360.
42. Shan-tao, *Fa-shih tsan (Hymns of the Nembutsu Liturgy)*, in *SSZ*, vol. 1, pp. 604–5. The passage in question reads, “The time has come when the five defilements increase and those who doubt and revile [Amida’s Vow] are numerous. Both monks and lay people despise [the nembutsu] and refuse to listen [to the teaching]. When they see those who practice it, the poison of anger arises in them; hindering others in every way, they vie in causing harm. (This portion is cited in *CWS*, p. 566.) Such people like these, who are born blind [to enlightenment] and lack the seeds to attain Buddhahood, destroy the sudden teaching, and [thus] are forever sinking [in transmigration]. Though they may pass through kalpas as numerous as the motes of dust in the great continent, they will be unable to gain liberation from the three lowest realms of [samsaric] existence.
43. See *SSZ*, vol. 1, pp. 555 and 567.
44. Tamaki Kōshirō examines the meaning of “excluded (only) are those. . . .” (*yuijo*) in the Sanskrit version of the exclusion clause of the Primal Vow. He shows the meaning to include “to restrict, detain, or

restrain." In China and Japan this developed into a sense of a "special ordering," the undercurrent of which implied that one is set in the direction of "dharma," which can be contacted with neither the physical nor mental eye. Tamaki's idea is richly and deeply suggestive. See Tamaki, "Yuijo gogyaku no imi ni tsuite: Chūgoku, Nihon hen," and "Yuijo gogyaku hihō shōbō no imi ni tsuite: Indo sōkatsuhēn."

45. *Hyakuyonjūgokajō mondō* (One Hundred Forty-five Questions and Answers), in *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 657.

46. *Muryōjukyōshaku*, in *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 88; *Tozanjō*, in *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 422.

47. Tao-ch'ō, *An-le chi* (Passages on the Land of Happiness) in *SSZ*, vol. 1, p. 377.

48. *Shi-fang yao-chüeh* (Essentials for Rebirth in the Western Land), in *Taishō*, vol. 47, p. 104a; cited in *SSZ*, vol. 1, p. 933.

49. Hōnen, *Jūnikajō mondō* (Questions and Answers in Twelve Sections), in *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 634.

50. Shan-tao, *Wang-sheng-li-tsan* (Hymns of Birth in the Pure Land), in *SSZ*, vol. 1, p. 651. Cited in *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 319, and *SSZ*, vol. 1, p. 944.

51. Ishii Kyōdō, *Senjakushū zenkō* (Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten, 1975).

52. *Muryōjukyōshaku*, in *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 72.

53. See *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 320; also *SSZ*, vol. 1, p. 945.

54. See *Hōnen zenshū*, pp. 336-8; also *SSZ*, vol. 1, pp. 971-76.

55. See *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 124.

56. See *Kōbō Daishi zenshū*, vol. 2 (1968; reprint, Kyoto: Dōbōsha, 1978), vol. 2, pp. 189-92.

57. Hōnen, *Kanmuryōjukyōshaku* (Commentary on the Contemplation Sutra), in *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 125.

58. *Fa-shih tsan*; see *SSZ*, vol. 1, p. 567.

59. *Kamakura ni'i no zenni e shinzuru gohenji*, in *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 529. See also *SSZ*, vol. 1, p. 605. The first four lines of this English translation have been taken from *CWS*, p. 566.

60. See *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 143.

61. See *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 346; also *SSZ*, vol. 1, p. 988.

62. See *SSZ*, vol. 1, p. 535; also *Hōnen zenshū*, pp. 64-65.

63. *Hōnen zenshū*, p. 350; also *SSZ*, vol. 1, p. 993.

64. Nichiren criticized the nembutsu for being an act of slander against the right dharma. This criticism began from the time of his sermons at the crossroads in Kamakura when he was thirty-two years old (1253). He

clarified the theory behind his criticism in his *Risshō ankokuron* (*A Treatise to Establish Righteousness and Peace for our Nation*) in 1260. In that text Nichiren states, “The true teaching of the *Lotus Sutra*, and the six hundred, thirty-seven sections and two thousand, eight hundred, and eighty-three chapters of Mahāyāna scriptures taught during Śākyamuni’s life, as well as all Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and devas—[Hōnen] includes them all within the ‘difficult’ and ‘sundry’ practices. He urges people to ‘reject, close, seal off, and abandon’ them. With these four words, he brings great confusion to all. He calls the sacred monks and disciples of the Buddha in the three countries ‘groups of thieves’ and other slanderous things. He comes close to repudiating the vow passage, ‘excluded are those who commit the five grave offenses and slander the right dharma,’ in the sacred three Pure Land sutras.” See *Risshō ankokuron*, in *Taishō*, vol. 84, pp. 204–205. Nichiren claims that Hōnen’s theory of “reject, close, seal off, and abandon” contravenes the meaning of the exclusion clause of the Eighteenth Vow. Thus, he states, the teaching of birth through the nembutsu itself constitutes the slandering of the right dharma.