

Itami:

Suffering in Japanese Christianity and Buddhism

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I. Introduction

Suffering and pain plague humanity as they have since such feelings were first recognized. As technology opens new doors of opportunity and hope for our species, so too does it open the doors into new realms of mass destruction and global suffering; the fires of World War II demonstrated that. From the atomic clouds of the first nuclear weapons to the charnel houses of the concentration camps, suffering has raised its head on a scale barely imaginable but one hundred years ago. The events of the modern era underscore the presence of suffering and daily remind theologians of its bitter existence.

Any theology formulated to speak to human existence must address suffering. Fortunately, theologians have thousands of years of experience to draw upon including the thoughts and musings of the great minds of the past who plumbed the same unsearchable depths. All religious traditions have faced these problems and have explained them in myriad ways. Western scholarship has focused primarily on its own tradition for answers to the fundamental questions of human existence and for this I can not condemn it; a tradition must know itself. In a world of quickly expanding global communications, however, interaction between different cultures and worlds occur on a daily basis. As members of this society, we would be remiss in not examining other traditions not only for what they may teach us about what others believe, but for what we ourselves can learn from them.

Ever since Japan's borders were opened to the world by Commodore Perry in 1853 knowledge has flowed to Japan; eager to gain new technology and learning, yet fearful of Western encroachment in Asia, Japan has been an avid student of Western ideas to the point that they are on an equal with their teachers in areas where they once lagged far behind. As well as technology and business techniques, Christianity was also

reintroduced into Japan in the nineteenth century. The Japanese Christian community has never been large but has always been disproportionately active and progressive in Japanese society.

Japan has also exported its ideas particularly its own strains of Buddhism which developed in a unique environment. Zen Buddhism in particular has found a home among many Westerners and Americans in particular and other schools of Buddhism such as the Shin and Nichiren are also being studied and practiced in America. Western scholarship would be remiss if it did not examine the products of Japanese society, both Buddhist and Christian.

In this work, I propose to examine the works of four Japanese theologians and to obtain an understanding of how they had approached the fundamental problem of human suffering. Naturally, these four do not represent all of the viewpoints and theologies found in Japan, but I believe them to be representative of the diversity of thought which can be found in Japanese religion. Two of these authors are Christians from the twentieth century, Dr. Kitamori Kazo¹ and Endo Shusaku. The other two are Buddhist authors, Ikkyu from the fifteenth century and Genshin from the tenth century.

II. Japanese Christian Sources

Theology of the Pain of God

Dr. Kitamori Kazo's *Theology of the Pain of God* was the first work of Japanese Christian theology to receive a wide reading both inside and outside churches in Japan. Written near the conclusion of the Second World War, its writing occurred during an age of great suffering for many Japanese. Dr. Kitamori was trained at a Lutheran seminary in Tokyo, but became a Union church minister when the government consolidated the Protestant churches into a monolithic whole before the war. Even though the Japanese

¹ Names are in Japanese order, family name first and personal name last.

Lutheran Church has since split from the Union church, Dr. Kitamori opted to remain in the Union and though advanced in years, is still teaching courses at the Tokyo Union Seminary and the Lutheran seminary from where he graduated.

Structure of the Theology of the Pain of God

Structurally, the Theology of the Pain of God resembles a collection of essays clustered around a single topic rather than a unified work. This is due in part to Dr. Kitamori's conception of his theology; he refers to it in other sources as a "*furoshiki* theology." A *furoshiki* is a piece of cloth which is used to wrap books, lunches, and assortments of random objects into an easily carriable package. In the same way, this theology, essentially simple, is able to wrap a number of apparently dissimilar concepts. The theology thus impacts on many topics in ethics and theology as a scan through the table of contents will reveal. Chapters such as "Service for the Pain of God," "The Mysticism of Pain," "The Pain of God and the Hidden God," and "The Pain of God and Eschatology," reveal the variety of topics which Kitamori places under the heading of the theology of the pain of God. Although many of the chapters further explain and unpack various parts of the theology, most of these can stand alone to be read by themselves once the reader has a grasp of Kitamori's main concept.

The Theology of the Theology of the Pain of God

Kitamori uses repeatedly the phrase "pain of God." "The term 'pain of God' however, has a double meaning. It represents the heart of God who loves the unlovable, on the one hand, and the heart of God who sacrifices his only beloved Son on the latter" (Kitamori, 138). Kitamori suggests that these two meanings are in fact two sides of the same coin, and that the key to comprehending this coin is the wrath of God. This argument presented in the chapter, "The Order of Love," discusses the wrath and love of God in terms of orders of love, "following Augustine and Pascal" (Kitamori, 117).

Kitamori breaks down God's love into three orders. "The first is the immediate 'love of God'; the second is the 'pain of God'; and the third is love rooted in the pain of God, which for convenience, we shall call the 'love . . . of God'" (Kitamori, 117).

The difference between the orders of love is the position and action of the person receiving, or not receiving, the love. In the first case, the "love of God," the object of affection is worthy of God's love. "The immediate 'love of God' is expressed in the father-son relationship when God the Father loves his completely obedient Son" (Kitamori, 117). Originally, Christ was not the only being worthy of this love, though. "As long as men in general are worthy of God's love, they can be regarded as objects of this love" (Kitamori, 118). Thus humanity when they follow the will of God may be worthy of this love. Due to the fallen nature of humanity, however, "now only Christ is its object. Man has now fallen away from this kind of God's love and has become unworthy of it because of sin and rebellion" (Kitamori, 118). As a consequence of the fall, humanity can no longer be an object of the love of God. "Love betrayed can only turn to anger" (Kitamori, 118). As a result, humanity feels the wrath of God for their duplicity.

The unusual understanding that Kitamori expresses in his theology is found in this second order of love:

The pain of God, which results from his love of the second order, has a double meaning. First, it is God's pain in the sense that he forgives and loves those who should not be forgiven; secondly, it is his pain in the sense that he sends his only beloved Son to suffer, even unto death (Kitamori, 120).

Even though humanity has become unlovable through the fall, God loves them still and forgives them. This act is inherently unjust because humanity deserves the wrath of God for their actions. Nonetheless, God forgives them and in doing so brings pain upon himself. This pain is of a dual nature. He keeps this pain contained because of his recognition of the act of Christ. First, sending Christ to die for the sins of humanity pains God as much as it would pain any loving earthly father to send his son into certain death.

In the sacrificial act, Christ is the target for the wrath of God and bears upon himself all of the wrath that humanity deserves. God then is directing his wrath at himself as Christ is part of himself. God should send his wrath upon those who have transgressed, yet because of his love he keeps it within himself because of and through the death of Christ. Thus, by slaying his own Son, God both forgives humanity for their transgressions and causes pain to himself.

The third order of love is God's victory through love and pain. "God, . . . , actually demonstrates his godliness when sinners become completely obedient to him by the pain of his forgiving love" (Kitamori, 121). This order of love is a recovery of the first order of love. Christ redeems humanity and allows us to reach a point of worthiness. God then redeems humanity by accepting Christ's sacrifice. Through God's pain, God is able to love again.

While Kitamori's primary focus is on God's pain, he also speaks to the pain and suffering of humanity. Naturally, this is done in terms of God's pain.

When the pain of God loves the human condition, it first makes human pain its own, becomes one with it, becomes immanent in it, and then seeks to resolve the pain which is tangible. . . . But since the true nature of human pain is to be found beyond the tangible suffering, the pain of God now transcends human pain and loves it in a way that embraces and supports its very roots. The true nature of man's condition lies in this: that it has nothing to support itself within. In a decisive crisis man becomes aware of this, and begins to seek his salvation in transcendent love (Kitamori, 103).

Kitamori makes a distinction here between tangible suffering and true suffering. This tangible suffering is absorbed into the pain of God. True pain can also be cured by God, but only through human seeking for transcendent love. The impetus for this search, however, lies in moments of tangible suffering. Kitamori does not take this to mean that human suffering has any intrinsic meaning, though.

It should be noted again that the pain of God gives meaning and value to human suffering.

We must admit that human suffering is able to serve in comprehending the meaning of God's pain, but human suffering does not have this meaning within

itself; it is only given to man by God's pain. The surpassing grace of God's pain makes human suffering valuable and precious (Kitamori, 147).

God's pain is what gives value to human pain. Pain serves as a bridge that can connect humans to God by linking pain and pain. In moments of human pain, humanity searches for meaning, a non-existent meaning. It must turn then to search for a transcendent love which it will find rooted in the pain of God.

In summary, Kitamori presents a view of a God whose very essence is pain. This pain is caused by the saving death of Christ which allows God to love humanity despite its sinful nature. Human suffering connects to and with this pain in its search for meaning.

Silence

Endo Shusaku is Japan's foremost Christian novelist. He was born in 1923 and eleven years later was baptized into the Catholic Church. His life and those of his characters dwell on the issue of East-West relations and, more specifically, what it means to be Christian in Japanese society. Despite his sensitive and penetrating examination of these issues, "Mr. Endo, in the course of discussions on his book [*Silence*], often protested that he was writing literature, not theology" (Endo, xviii). The majority of his readers though, believe that he is writing both. His works include *Volcano*, *When I Whistle*, *The Sea and the Poison*, *The Samurai*, *A Life of Jesus*, and his most famous novel, *Silence*.

Plot Synopsis

Silence is a tale of seventeenth-century Japan that follows the tribulations of a Portuguese priest who has gone underground in a land hostile to Christianity. A story based on real events, a young priest, Sebastian Rodrigues, sets out for Japan after word is received in the West that his teacher and mentor, Christovao Ferreira, had apostatized under the torture of his Japanese persecutors. Reluctant to believe this report, he hurries

to Japan, accompanied by two other priests who were also students of Ferriera. One of them is felled by illness and cannot finish the journey to Japan. Rodrigues and Garpe, the other priest, arrive in Japan accompanied by Kichijiro, a Japanese of bad character. They are immediately hidden from the authorities by some Japanese Christians in the village of Tomogi. After a while, Christians from Goto, Kichijiro's village, come and ask Rodrigues to accompany them back to their village and he complies. He returns to Tomogi after ministering to the people of Goto, but after his return the authorities raid the village, and imprison and martyr two of the village leaders. Since the village is no longer safe, the priests split up and leave the area. Rodrigues wanders through an abandoned village and follows the tracks of another person going through the wilderness. The person turns out to be Kichijiro who then betrays Rodrigues to the authorities. Rodrigues is imprisoned and questioned by Inoue, the government representative. Ferriera who has indeed apostatized speaks to him and attempts to convince him to apostasize as well, but the priest refuses. Finally, in a dramatic scene between Ferriera and Rodrigues, Rodrigues apostatizes to save the lives of three Japanese Christians who are being tortured for this purpose.

Suffering in Silence

The chief focus of *Silence* is the suffering of the Christians in Japan. Endo frequently highlights the miserable living conditions of the peasants through the Western eyes of Rodrigues. The persecution of Christianity has reached such levels that no one may trust another not to inform on them; the reward for turning in a Christian is substantial and the temptation great among the starving farmers. Neighbors are to carefully watch each other for signs of following the forbidden religion. The Christians must hide themselves as best they can and may trust no one that they do not know intimately.

I have already told you that Mokichi and Ichizo have expressionless

faces, much like puppets. Now I understand the reason why. They cannot register on their faces any sorrow -- nor even joy. The long years of secrecy have made the faces of these Christians like masks. This is indeed bitter and sad. Why has God given our Christians such a burden? This is something I fail to understand. (Endo, 52)

This suffering is a constant feature of the lives of these peasants. Christianity and suffering are inextricably tied for these Japanese Christians. They are persecuted and killed because they are Christians. Evidently the easiest path would be for these Japanese to renounce their Christianity, but Christianity is the one thing in their life that gives them dignity, humanity, and the strength to continue.

The reason our religion has penetrated this territory like water flowing into dry earth is that it has given to this group of people a human warmth they never previously knew. For the first time they have met men who treated them like human beings. It was the human kindness and charity of the fathers that touched their hearts. (Endo, 49)

Indeed, it is their faith which sustains them through their suffering. If they were to give this up, then their suffering will overcome them.

Why does the song of the exhausted Mokichi, bound to the stake, gnaw constantly at my heart:

We're on our way , we're on our way,
We're on our way to the temple of Paradise,
To the temple of Paradise.
To the great temple.

I have heard from the people of Tomogi that many Christians when dragged off to the place of execution sang this hymn -- a melody filled with dark sadness. Life in this world is too painful for these Japanese peasants. Only by relying on 'the temple of Paradise' have they been able to go on living. Such is the sadness that fills this song (Endo, 93).

The fact that this suffering goes unnoticed by God disheartens Rodrigues completely. He speaks constantly of the dreadful silence of God towards the plight of these Christians. This silence is one of the motifs that Endo uses to shed light on and explain suffering. Indeed, the above quote continues as follows:

What do I want to say? I myself do not quite understand. Only that today, when for the glory of God Mokichi and Ichizo moaned, suffered and died, I cannot bear the monotonous sound of the dark sea gnawing at the shore. Behind the depressing

silence of the sea, the silence of God. . . . the feeling that while men raise their voices in anguish God remains with folded arms, silent (Endo, 93).

This silence haunts the priest throughout the book bringing him to question both his calling and his belief. The priest is not the only one dissuaded by the suffering and the silence of God, though.

Kichijiro was still sniveling. 'Why has Deus Sama given us this trial? We have done no wrong,' he cried.

We [the priests] were silent. Mokichi and Ichizo also remained silent; their eyes seemed to be fixed on a speck in the empty sky (Endo, 83).

The silence of the priests and of the people mirror the silence of God. Yet Mokichi and Ichizo have their eyes fixed on the seemingly empty sky, on the temple of Paradise where they will soon journey.

The second literary motif that Endo uses is that of the face of Jesus. Throughout his travels, the face and actions of Jesus are recalled by Rodrigues. These actions are parallel, yet Rodrigues does not fully understand the implications of this concept until the end of the novel. This motif begins when Rodrigues is leaving the abandoned village that he entered on his flight from Tomogi.

The clouds disappeared from the water and instead there appeared the face of a man -- yes, there reflected in the water was a tired, hollow face. I don't know why, but at that moment I thought of the face of yet another man. This was the face of a crucified man, a face which for so many centuries had given inspiration to artists. This man none of these artists had seen with his own eyes, yet they portrayed his face -- the most pure, the most beautiful that has claimed the prayers of man and has corresponded with his highest aspirations. . . . Yet the face reflected in this pool of rainwater was heavy with mud and with stubble; it was thin and dirty; it was the face of a haunted man filled with uneasiness and exhaustion (Endo, 103-104).

The face of Christ appears in the waters, yet the face that Rodrigues sees is his own. This face is not a face of purity and beauty, but the appearance of one who suffers.

The priest's capture and journey to the prison is compared with that of Jesus as the priest looks to the Stations of the Cross for solace. In both cases, a mob of people jeered and shouted at the lone figure headed towards his doom. "Many centuries ago, that man

tasted with his dried and swollen tongue all of the suffering that I now endure, [Rodrigues] reflected. And this sense of suffering shared softly eased his mind and heart more than the sweetest water" (Endo, 152). Throughout his suffering, Rodrigues draws similar parallels between his trials and that of Christ. These connections, though, are of Rodrigues' own devising. This is a product of his own flawed reasoning. The true appearance of the suffering Christ is manifested in Endo's description of the appearance of the face of Christ.

The face of Christ appears to Rodrigues at five points in *Silence*. The first time is in the pool of rainwater in the village; Rodrigues is shown the face of the suffering Christ. The second time, Rodrigues is in prison. He is imprisoned with several Japanese Christians and life has settled into a comfortable rhythm. "Here in the prison, for the first time since the days of Tomogi, he was able to exercise his faculties as a priest; and the realization of this made him pray secretly that such a life might continue for ever" (Endo, 162). During the practice of his true vocation, Rodrigues finds himself one night encountering again the Christ.

At night, as he sat in the dark listening to the sound of the turtle-dove in the trees, he felt the face of Christ looking intently at him. The clear blue eyes were gentle with compassion; the features were tranquil; it was a face filled with trust. 'Lord, you will not cast us way any longer,' he whispered, his eyes fixed upon that face. And then the answer seemed to come to his ears: 'I will not abandon you.' Bowing his head he strained his ears for the sound of that voice again; but the only thing that he could hear was the singing of the turtle-dove. The darkness was thick and black. Yet the priest felt that for one instant his heart had been purified (Endo, 162).

Just as Rodrigues has found peace so is this appearance that of Christ at peace. No longer the suffering God but the God in contentment and fulfillment. Rodrigues is at one with him for but a second, but it is union; it is purification.

The next time that Christ appears to the priest, it is not an appearance of peace and comfort. Kichijiro has dogged Rodrigues' heels ever since he turned the priest in to the authorities. Kichijiro enters the prison and begs forgiveness from Rodrigues.

Rodrigues, not understanding Christ's treatment of Judas, cannot bring himself to forgive his own Judas. Then, "Once again near his face came the face of Christ, wet with tears. When the gentle eyes looked straight into his, the priest was filled with shame" (Endo, 176). The face of Christ silently rebukes Rodrigues for his inability to forgive his betrayer. Rodrigues has not yet grasped a full understanding of the mission and purpose of the Christ.

The fourth appearance of the face of Christ is at the dramatic moment of Rodrigues' apostatizing. The symbol of apostasis is stepping on the *fumie*, a bronze plaque bearing the picture of Christ or the Madonna and Child. This particular *fumie* bears the figure of Jesus and it is transformed into the face of Christ.

And then the Christ in bronze speaks to the priest: 'Trample! Trample! I more than anyone know of the pain in your foot. Trample! It was to be trampled on by men that I was born into this world. It was to share men's pain that I carried my cross.

The priest placed his foot on the *fumie*. Dawn broke. And far in the distance the cock crew (Endo, 259).

By placing his foot on the bronze image, the priest renounces his faith.

The final appearance of the face of Christ is an explanation of suffering, and of silence. In this appearance, Christ corrects the view that Rodrigues holds about silence and suffering. Earlier in the novel, Rodrigues explain his concept of suffering when a Japanese authority figure asks him why God gives so many trials and sufferings of all kind to man. Rodrigues replies, "Sufferings of every kind? I think you are missing the point. If only man faithfully observes the commandments of our Deus he should be able to live in peace" (137). The one missing the point is Rodrigues. In the end, however, he comes to know his mistake and is instructed by the bronze Christ.

Even now that face is looking at me with eyes of pity from the plaque rubbed flat by many feet. 'Trample!' said those compassionate eyes. 'Trample! Your foot suffers in pain; it must suffer like all of the feet that have stepped on this plaque. But that pain alone is enough. I understand your pain and your suffering. It is for that reason that I am here.'

'Lord, I resented your silence.'

'I was not silent. I suffered beside you.'
'But you told Judas to go away. What thou dost do quickly. What happened to Judas?'
'I did not say that. Just as I told you to step on the plaque, so I told Judas to do what he was going to do. For Judas was in anguish as you are now.' (Endo, 285)

With this new and proper understanding of Christ and his actions, Rodrigues can finally truly forgive Kichijiro; the priest's entire understanding of God is changed through this encounter. "[Rodrigues] loved him now in a different way from before" (Endo, 286). Rodrigues now understands that God was not silent, that God spoke to and through the sufferings of the Japanese Christians. "Everything that had taken place until now had been necessary to bring him to this love. 'Even now I am the last priest in this land. But Our Lord was not silent. Even if he had been silent, my life until this day would have spoken of him.'" (Endo, 286) This suffering was necessary for the priest to come to the fullest understanding of God and Christ.

Suffering, then for Endo, is a necessary and natural part of the human experience. His peasants did not try to run or hide from their suffering. Instead, they embraced it with the arms of faith. Through Christianity, they did not flee suffering, but understood it as part of their faith and union with Christ.

A Christian Understanding of Suffering

Kitamori leaves little doubt about his position on suffering; Endo's position, however, is not as well defined. Kitamori's work is a theological tract where he offers his positions and clearly delineates them; Endo's work is a novel where his theological positions must be teased forth from the literary work in which they are imbedded. Within the structure of the novel, Endo links his conception of pain to his Christology. Endo appears to separate and delineate the Trinity; God himself as the first person of the Trinity does not appear. It is the silence of God the Father which so disturbs Rodrigues. When he

comes to terms with faith, silence, and suffering, he encounters Christ, the second person of the Trinity. This is the person through which God enters Endo's world. He does not discuss the action of the Spirit.

Kitamori, on the other hand, presents in many ways a psychological look at God the Father. His theology of suffering involves God's repression of wrath. This repression is done out of love for Christ and his sacrifice. Christ is the cause of God's suffering, and Christ did and does suffer, but Kitamori's focus is on the suffering that God undergoes as a result of what happens to Christ; Kitamori's concern is about the pain of a father who has lost a son, not the pain of the suffering son. In a similar way, Jesus, the historical preacher, is important for what he reveals about the Father and the pain of the God.

Both Endo and Kitamori agree that God as the sum of the Trinity feels pain and suffers but their presentations focus on different persons of the Trinity. Does Endo's God the Father feel pain? Again, due to the structure of Endo's work, he leaves the reader no clues as to his personal beliefs on this matter. Kitamori's Christ certainly feels pain, but he does not share the same quality of immanence that Endo's Christ does.

The issue of immanence leads into the question of human suffering. Endo's Christ comforts human suffering with his presence. He suffers together with humanity through their physical agonies and through their mental agonies, including their betrayal of him. Endo clears his God of the crime of silence through his depiction of the immanent Christ. God thus intersects with human life through suffering.

Kitamori uses the injunction to serve the neighbor and to aid the hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, and imprisoned to formulate and understanding of the immanent God. "God becomes immanent in these realities of pain: he says, 'for I was hungry'" (Kitamori, 98). This explains why love of neighbor is connected to love of God. God is immanent in our neighbor through their sufferings. At the same time, Kitamori's God is a transcendent one, because while charity may give freedom from the ills of the world, it cannot grant freedom from all suffering. The transcendent love of God in the forgiveness

of sin, the actuality of the pain, is the only source of true healing for suffering. God connects with humanity and saves humanity both through his transcendence and immanence, but it is a connection deeply related to pain and suffering.

Both Endo and Kitamori then connect human pain to the immanence of God. Kitamori continues to explain that human pain outside of this connection is meaningless. Endo is silent on the matter. Silence does offer some clues towards an understanding of pain, though. All of the suffering that occurs within the work occurs to people of faith. Christ states at the end of the book, "I understand your pain and suffering. It is for that reason that I am here" (Endo, 285). Christ, through virtue of his experience and presence, understands human pain. Thus, people are able to come to him while they are in pain and he offers them consolation. The Christians in the book are able to hand their burden of suffering over to him. The focus in this section is not the pain, but the immanence of Christ. Endo seems to be unconcerned with pain. His concern is with Christ and humanity's relationship to and with Christ that happens in times of pain. The pain appears to be a conduit to reach God, but this is never directly expressed.

In summary, both Kitamori and Endo believe that God suffers pain jointly with humanity. In Kitamori, God the Father feels pain, and in Endo Christ feels pain, but whoever feels it, God as a whole has a connection to and experience with pain. In both, pain is important in relation to the immanence of God. Human suffering is a means to reaching God. Kitamori regards pain itself as meaningless without God, and Endo seems to agree, but his position is not explicitly stated.

III. Japanese Buddhist Selections

"Ikkyu's Skeletons"

Ikkyu, Zen monk and poet, lived from 1394 to 1481 mostly in Kyoto. Born the illegitimate child of a high ranking government official, he rose quickly through the

monastic ranks and became abbot of Kyoto's Daitokuji temple. He became notorious for his wild ways including heavy drinking and spending much time in brothels. His scandalous affair with a blind girl when he was in his sixties shocked the religious establishment. Despite these breaches of monastic code, his poetry is held in high esteem for its teachings, particularly his verses which cut to the very root of the Heart Sutra.

"Skeletons" was written in 1457 when Ikkyu was in his early sixties and should be understood within the context of the late Muromachi period. A series of wars culminating in the brutal Onin wars were fought over Imperial succession as clans striving for power set up pretenders to the throne. Kyoto was attacked many times and certain areas were burned repeatedly. This was a time of great human suffering and turmoil. Ikkyu's dreams of dancing skeletons are undoubtedly a reaction to the bloodshed and misery that he saw occurring around him.

The Plot of "Skeletons"

The work falls into three major sections. The first begins with Ikkyu's comments on the nature of reality and is concerned with the concept of emptiness. "All things emerge from the 'emptiness'" (Ikkyu, 77). Ikkyu himself then enters the scene.

According to the teaching of an enlightened man, the way of no return is the separation from Hell and rebirth, and the thought of so many people, whether related to me or not, passing through reincarnations one after another, made me so melancholy, I left my native place and wandered off at random (Ikkyu, 77).

Ikkyu wanders until he reaches the Samadhi Plain. Samadhi is the Buddhist term for a state of deep concentration usually associated with meditation. On this plain he finds a "small lonely temple. It was evening, when dew and tears wet one's sleeves" (Ikkyu, 77). All of his images create an atmosphere of suffering and grief. A skeleton appears from behind the Buddha Hall and recites a pair of poems decrying those who "simply pass life by" (Planck, 77). Ikkyu then comments on the illusory and meaningless nature of life, even the meaningless nature of the Buddha's fifty years of preaching. He goes to sleep in

the Buddha Hall and dreams. In the dream, he first sees a skeleton who punctuates the concept of non-duality. "But when is it [existence] not a dream? Who is not a skeleton? . . . When the breathing stops and the skin of the body is broken there is no more form, no higher and lower. . . High and low, young and old -- there is no difference between them" (Ikkyu, 78-9). Also later, "Give up the idea: 'I exist.' Just let your body be blown along by the wind of the floating clouds; rely on this" (Ikkyu, 79).

The second section is a collection of poems spoke by various skeletons describing the transience and illusion of life. Death is the end for all, but this too is an illusion.

Not a single soul
Knows why he is born,
Or his real dwelling place;
We go back to our origin,
We become earth again.

Our real mind
Has no beginning,
No end;
Do not fancy
That we are born, and die. (Ikkyu, 80)

The skeletons criticize the actions of humans as being vanity and worthless for these busy humans know what the end result shall be, yet still seek to avoid it.

The third section seeks to answer a question. "Realizing how foolish they are who, not knowing that all things are and must be temporary and transient, are baffled, someone this very day asked how we should live in this fleeting world" (Ikkyu, 82). Ikkyu begins this answer with a critique of the priesthood. "Formerly those who were religiously inclined entered the temples, but now they all shun them. The priests are devoid of wisdom; they find *zazen* boring" (Ikkyu, 82). He continues by outlining the basics of Buddhist belief on reincarnation and on non-duality and emptiness. "The mind and things are one and the same" (Ikkyu, 82). All things are part of the Original Field which is another name for emptiness. Life in this world should be a return to the realization of these truths.

The Theology of "Skeletons"

"Skeletons" discusses death and suffering as two parts of the same problem. Both non-duality and enlightenment occupy Ikkyu's mind as release from the suffering of this world. Enlightenment means conference and understanding of the truth of non-duality and freedom from the repeated cycle of lives. Physical suffering is then seen as a goad to push the practitioner towards the attainment of enlightenment.

If they can serve
To bring us to loathe them,
The troubles of this world
Are most welcome (Ikkyu, 80).

If we truly loathe the sufferings of this world, then we will try all the harder to attain enlightenment to free ourselves from this condition. In this way, suffering is a help in our journey through life. Ultimately, though, it is meaningless.

In the poetry of the skeletons, Ikkyu reveals his conceptions of transience and the illusory nature of life. Sufferings, evil, even death, all are illusions:

It becomes ash when burned,
And earth when buried --
Could anything
Remain as evil? (Ikkyu, 82)

In this world
Where everything, without exception,
Is unreal,
Death also
Is devoid of reality (Ikkyu, 84).

Nothing is reality; all is vanity. "It is useless to pray to the gods about your destiny. Think only of the One Great Matter. Human beings are mortal; there is nothing to be shocked about" (Ikkyu, 79). The One Great Matter of which he speaks is enlightenment and the realization that all things are emptiness. "When we are enlightened concerning the One Great Causality we understand the meaning of unborn, undying" (Ikkyu, 79). Unborn, undying represents the freedom from the cycle of births and deaths.

Ikkyu does refer once to a real pain, but this is one which arises only after the realization of non-duality. "Few indeed experience this agony" (Ikkyu, 77), for this is the agony brought on by truth:

All things must at some time become nought, that is, return to their original reality. When we sit facing the wall doing *zazen*, we realize that none of the thoughts that arise in our minds, as a result of karma, are real. The Buddha's fifty years of teaching are meaningless. The mistake comes from not knowing what the mind is. Musing that few indeed experience this agony, I entered the Buddha Hall and spent the night there, feeling more lonely than usual, and being unable to sleep (Ikkyu, 78).

After this revelation, the skeletons appear to him. Based on the context, the agony that he refers to must be open only to those who have attained enlightenment; This agony appears to have its roots in regret rather than true suffering.

In summary, Ikkyu views worldly suffering as an illusory experience, as fleeting as joy, birth, or death. Suffering can fulfill a proper role when it encourages humanity towards release from worldly bonds. Other than that, it has no function and no underlying reality. The source of suffering is rooted in human ignorance and once that is overcome, suffering itself will be overcome.

Essentials of Salvation

Genshin was a monk from the Tendai school of Esoteric Buddhism who lived from 942 to 1017, and laid a basis for the Pure Land school in his masterpiece, *Essentials of Salvation*. While Tendai Buddhism focuses on rituals and magic for the attainment of enlightenment, it bases itself upon two pillars: meditation and the study of the Lotus sutra. The Tendai teaching disturbed Genshin in its narrowness; enlightenment could only be attained by male monks. He became convinced that another path existed which offered enlightenment to all. The result of his exhaustive study of the Buddhist scriptures resulted in him placing his faith entirely in the *nembutsu*. This *nembutsu* is an invocation of the name of Amida Buddha who after five kalpas (an inordinately long period of time)

declared that he would save all living creatures. The *Essentials of Salvation* lists the reasons for invoking the *nembutsu* and backs this list with references to the copious Buddhist canon.

Faith in the efficacy of the *nembutsu* grew into a fully developed school of its own under the auspices of Honen and Shinran in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This school was referred to as the Pure Land school due to its belief that repeating these invocations of the *nembutsu* would result in birth into Amida Buddha's Western paradise known as the Pure Land. Pure Land Buddhism is still a major force in modern Buddhist thought and many of its original concepts are based on Genshin's *Essentials of Salvation*.

Structure of Essentials of Salvation

In his introduction, Genshin describes the structure of his work.

In all there are ten divisions, divided into three volumes. The first is the corrupt life which one must shun, the second is the pure land for which one must seek, the third is the proof of the existence of the pure land, the fourth is the correct practice of *nembutsu*, the fifth is the helpful means of the practicing of *nembutsu*, the sixth is the practice of *nembutsu* on special occasions, the seventh is the benefit resulting from *nembutsu*, the eighth is the proof of the benefit accruing from *nembutsu* alone, the ninth is the conduct leading to birth in Paradise, and the tenth comprises questions and answers to selected problems. (Genshin, 199)

The first two chapters impact on suffering and the human condition. Normally these are the only two translated from this work. These two are rather straight-forward and clear whereas the others are quite subtle and esoteric.

The first chapter recounts down to the most minute detail the sufferings contained in the six paths of life. The six paths of life are the six creatures that humans can be reborn as or places where they must dwell depending on their actions in this life. The six are: "1) hell; 2) hungry demons; 3) beasts; 4) fighting demons; 5) man; 6) Deva" (Genshin, 199). Genshin describes a Buddhist cosmology by compiling a variety of

descriptions of the hell realm from authoritative Buddhist writings and merging them together into a monolithic horror of raining swords, intense fires, intensely hot dung, and other similar experiences. Indeed, as Genshin begins the chapter he states, "The first division, the corrupt land which one must shun, comprises the three realms [past, present, and future] in which there is no peace" (Genshin, 199). The land of existence in which all creatures dwell is a place of wretched existence.

The second division bears a similar description of Amida's Pure Land but in opposite terms.

The second division is the Pure Land towards which one must aspire. The rewards of Paradise are of endless merit. Should one speak of them for a hundred kalpas or even for a thousand kalpas, one would not finish describing them; should one count them or give examples of them, there would still be no way to know of them. At present, ten pleasures in praise of the Pure Land shall be explained, and they are as but a single hair floating upon the great sea. (Genshin, 201)

Genshin draws a picture of ultimate spiritual bliss in this Paradise. After he describes ten pleasures of the Pure Land, he discusses the death of one who has faithfully recited the *nembutsu*.

Generally when an evil man's life comes to an end, the elements of wind and fire leave first, and as they control movement and heat, great suffering is felt. When a good man dies earth and water depart first, and as they leave gently, they cause no pain. How much less painful then must be the death of a man who has accumulated merit through *nembutsu*!" (Genshin, 202)

Even the pleasures which exist in the heavenly realms are not pleasures at all in comparison to the joys found in Amida's Paradise. As Genshin describes the tortures of existence in the corrupt land so too does he extol the pleasures and joys of existing in the Pure Land.

The Theology of Essentials of Salvation

Genshin describes samsaric existence, that is, existence in the phenomenal world, as the greatest of all possible evils. He delights in his vivid description of the hell world, separating it into eight parts: "1) The hell of repeated misery; 2) The hell of black chains; 3) The hell of mass suffering; 4) The hell of wailing; 5) The hell of great wailing; 6) The hell of searing heat; 7) The hell of great searing heat, and 8) The hell of incessant suffering" (Genshin, 199). Beings enter these hells for a variety of reasons, most of them having to do with the harming or killing of other beings. As a result, beings born into this realm suffer because of their actions in a previous life. They are still caught in the karmic cycle of cause and effect and since they have been reborn into a hell world, they must suffer for their past harmful deeds. As a result, suffering is a result of past actions. Evil actions will result in a birth in a hell realm whereas a life of good actions may allow a person to be reborn as a human or even in a heavenly realm.

Just because a being is reborn in a heaven realm does not mean that they have escaped suffering, though. As Genshin points out, "The pleasures of the Thirty-three-fold heaven which last a billion years, the pleasures of deep meditation in the palace of the Great Brahma heaven, are not pleasures at all, for the cycle of transmigration is not at an end, and one cannot escape the evils of the three worlds" (Genshin, 202). Even in a heaven world, evils appear causing harm and suffering to creatures.

Suffering even appears in the moment of death tied once again to previous actions. Genshin recounts how those who are evil die a more painful death than the good. He implies that there is a strong connection between evil and suffering. If a person undertakes evil actions, then they will suffer more. While this promotes an ethical code, acting in a good manner does not assure that a person will not suffer. In fact, there is only one action which will free a person from suffering: the recitation of the *nembutsu*.

In summary, Genshin interprets suffering as the result of performing evil or at least wrong actions. Deliberately performing evil actions will cause suffering; performing wrong actions would not necessarily mean performing evil but would mean not

performing the only truly virtuous action: reciting the *nembutsu*. Genshin's purpose in writing the first chapter is to frighten his audience with a description of the horrors of hell. With this description, he hopes to motivate them in order that they might avoid this fate. He offers as an alternative the joys of Amida's Pure Land, and sets these as a worthy goal to replace a life of suffering. Thus, suffering acts as punishment for misdeeds and an incentive to leave this samsaric existence and attain rebirth in Amida's Western Paradise.

A Buddhist Understanding of Suffering

Both Ikkyu and Genshin are fairly clear on their understandings of suffering. Ikkyu believes that suffering is illusory and meaningless except as a goad towards enlightenment. The attainment of enlightenment in the realization of emptiness will free humanity from this illusory suffering and from the cycle of birth and death. Genshin believes that suffering is very real and painful for those still bound to samsaric existence. Release from this pain is only possible through rebirth in Amida's Pure Land. In the Pure Land, humanity will learn that all that they thought was suffering and all that they thought was joy is inconsequential in comparison to the experience that they will find with Amida. Thus, Genshin sees suffering as means to lead people to the Pure Land.

Both Buddhist authors view pain and suffering as something which leads humanity away from these things and towards enlightenment which extinguishes all desire and therefore suffering. Classical Buddhism has normally formulated suffering in the following manner, summed in the Four Noble Truths which Shakyamuni Buddha, the historical Buddha or the Buddha of this Saha world taught. The first is that pain exists. Pain is caused by desire, attachment. Desire can be extinguished. The way to extinguishing desire is to follow the way of the Buddha. Both Ikkyu and Genshin agree on these four truths. Their point of departure is how the way of the Buddha should be followed. Ikkyu holds that the way to extinguish desire is through samadhi,

concentration, brought on through *zazen* meditation. Genshin, however, believes that the way of the Buddha is found only in the recitation of the *nembutsu*.

*IV. Buddhist and Christian Conceptions of Suffering:
a Comparison*

The Christian authors connect on the concept of the Trinity; not only does Buddhism reject the Trinity, but it rejects the concept of God altogether. The Buddhist authors connect on the recognition of the normative value of the Four Noble Truths. Naturally, the Christian authors reject this view of reality. Logically, before any discussion can take place between the two Buddhist authors and the two Christian authors, common ground between the Christian and Buddhist conceptions of suffering must be sought and found.

Buddhism is often accused of being escapist since it focuses on the cessation of suffering. The rejection of attachment is often interpreted to mean the rejection of all emotion and feeling; a Buddhist is properly detached if they experience neither pain nor joy. All human events are perceived from an attitude of detached disinterest. This view misunderstands detachment and suffering. The *dukkha*, or suffering, encountered in the Four Noble Truths is existential suffering, not physical suffering. Kitamori makes a similar distinction between two types of suffering in his discussion on the immanence and transcendence of God. He differentiates between tangible suffering like hunger, poverty, nakedness, persecution, and imprisonment and what may be called existential suffering. Kitamori calls this pain "sin," but describes it in the following manner. "The true nature of man's condition lies in this: that it has nothing to support itself *within*. In a decisive crisis man becomes aware of this, and begins to seek his salvation in transcendent love" (Kitamori, 103). What Kitamori calls sin would be familiar to a Buddhist as *dukkha*.

Kitamori's cure for tangible human suffering such as hunger, poverty and imprisonment is found in Christian charity; his cure for the deeper pains of existence is found in the transcendent love of God and the forgiveness of sins spring forth from the reality of God's pain. Within *Silence*, Endo encompasses both physical and existential suffering. The cure for these is connection with Christ. While the Christian will still experience physical pain and suffering, the presence of Christ in and with their suffering comforts them. Making Christ the central figure in their lives frees them from existential suffering. Ikkyu and Genshin offer the enlightenment experience as the cure for the deeper pains of existence. Enlightenment contains the power to free humanity from the karmic cycle of births and deaths, freedom from the realm of painful samsaric existence. What they do not offer in their writings is any kind of release from the immediate worldly sufferings of hunger or poverty or war. While enlightenment will end existence in a realm of suffering by severing the cycle, it does not aid or comfort a person still rooted in samsaric existence unless they find it in the knowledge that this is their last lifetime of such suffering.

As a result, the Christian authors, Kitamori in particular, offer an ethic rooted in the relief of the suffering of others in this world whereas the Buddhist authors reject such work in this world as a waste of effort that could and should be properly applied elsewhere. This highlights the difference between the Christian and Buddhist conceptions of reality. The Christians believe that this world is meaningful if only because of the presence of God. God who is Other became immanent in this world through its creation, the saving events of history, and in the Incarnation. While God is transcendent from the world, his activity in the world demonstrates that the events of this world are meaningful to some degree. The Buddhists do not discuss the creation of the world; such matters are considered to be questions which tend not towards edification. The Buddha volunteered to enter into the Saha world and preach the Dharma, or teachings of the Buddha, in order that humanity might learn the truth and leave this existence. Thus Christianity ascribes

value to the presence of God in this world where the Buddhists reject such a notion of any value in this world.

V. Conclusion

I find many things about these theologies to be quite compelling. As a Lutheran student of Zen, I confess that Kitamori and Ikkyu speak more to me than either the radical Christocentrism of Endo or the other-worldly emphasis of Genshin. The illusory nature of pain and reality is determined strongly in the theology of the Book of Ecclesiastes. "Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity" (Eccl: 1:2). Qoheleth, the Teacher, agrees that life is illusory and finally meaningless. Within both Kitamori and Ikkyu are chords which resonate with this philosophy. In fact, Ikkyu's translator finds the similarities to be so similar that he uses the language of Ecclesiastes in his translation.

Vanity of vanities
The form of one
I saw this morning
Has become the smoky cloud
of the evening sky
(Ikkyu, 81)

This verse relating to cremation could be appropriated to sum Ecclesiastes' conception of death as well. "For the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and humans have no advantage over the animals; all is vanity. All go to one place; all are from dust, and all turn to dust again" (Eccl 2:19-20). Indeed the conceptions of reality of this anonymous Hebrew sage and a Japanese Zen monk parallel each other on several points.

The matter on which they do not and cannot agree is the place of God and actions within this reality. While Qoheleth interprets human life as illusory, he sides with Kitamori in giving both pain and existence meaning in God. "With many dreams come vanities and a multitude of words; but fear God" (Eccl 5:7) Despite these vanities and

meaningless words, the fear of God is still a necessary component of life. Qoheleth recognizes that the only substance in our reality is to be found in God and that humans must cling to him. "In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider; God has made both the one as well as the other, so that mortals may not find out anything that will come after them" (Eccl 7:14) Qoheleth sees God as the source of both our joys and our pains and it is this connection that makes them meaningful. In conclusion, Qoheleth sums his nebulous statements concerning vanity and joy with a simple injunction: "This is what I have seen to be good: it is fitting to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of the life God gives us; for this is our lot" (Eccl 5:18) Thus Japanese Christian theologian, Japanese Zen monk, anonymous Hebrew sage, and an American college student speak of the vanity of life and find meaning within the comfort of religious experience.

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