

Contribution

Religious Reformations in Japan and Europe: An Encounter of Nichiren and Martin Luther

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THE 16th century in Europe was a time of dramatic change in politics, religion and general intellectual history; just as it was the case in Japan in the 13th century. As a result of the interplay of numerous personalities and historical factors, the 16th century in Central Europe, and especially in the “Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation”, experienced a transformation, which is connected, among others, with the names of Emperor Charles V. and Martin Luther; in 13th-century Japan with the names of Nichiren, Hōnen, Shinran and (to a smaller extent) Dōgen. However, the respective transformations are not to be seen as the result of historical detailed study that would have concluded with an epoch-making paradigm shift, but, to be precise, we must be aware of the fact that we are working here with posterior interpretations of long-term processes, with “master narratives”¹ and historical grand narratives, that is to say, with constructions that allow us to understand history (and the present) and that facilitate comprehensive interpretations. With that we drop the claim to allow for or rather to reach the greatest possible representation of “historical reality”, but it is only in this way that the 13th Japanese century and the 16th European century can be compared at all.

Historical, Political and Social Developments in Europe and Japan

The most important features of a transformation in Central Europe at that time were:

- Impoverishment of the population due to a dropping gold price, general inflation and decreasing spending power. Migration to the cities and an increase in population supported urbanization and the poverty of the rural population compared to the increasingly wealthy urban citizenry.
- From the middle of the 15th century it was possible to print books

using flexible typesetting; thus facilitating the mass production of documents.

- Humanism with its motto “ad fontes” (back to the sources) as a trend within intellectual history led to a renewed general appreciation of ancient authors and texts, which were consulted in order to criticize current conditions. This new appreciation was transferred to the Bible and its re-evaluation vis-à-vis church tradition. From that the Reformers developed the principle *sola scriptura* to which were added three further principles (*sola fide, sola gratia, solus Christus*).
- Regarding foreign policy, the situation in Europe was characterized by the antagonism of the Hapsburg Empire (Emperor Charles V.) towards France (King Francis I.). Then there was the fear of the advancing Ottomans who were threatening Vienna in 1529. This situation also found its expression in Luther’s works where he vehemently cursed the Turks. The fact that the Emperor, owing to duties related to foreign policy, stayed mostly out of the country, helped the expansion of the Reformation.

In Japan the period from the end of the 12th century until the beginning of the 14th century (1192–1333) was influenced by some marked changes. This epoch called Kamakura period received its name due to the fact that the de facto ruling military government (*bakufu*) headed by the Shōgun resided in Kamakura, while the disempowered Imperial Court was in Kyoto. It replaced the almost 400-year-long era of the Heian period. During that time the Emperor was officially in power with his royal seat in Heian-Kyo (today’s Kyoto), but then, bit by bit, the power moved to the Fujiwara family.² Connected to this process was the transference of power from the court nobility in Kyoto and the “cloistered emperors”, that is, the resigned monarchs that had the say in the Heian period, to the military nobles, the *Bushi/Samurai*. Through close personal interconnections between high-ranking members of the religious orders and the court nobility, the landed property and power of Buddhist institutions had increased constantly; the monasteries had built armies of monks that were deployed in fights against rival religious orders but also against the Imperial Court and other rulers, i.e. when it was necessary to defend oneself against unpopular personnel decisions—the right to assign high positions in Buddhist orders was exercised by state-run institutions. At the same time, the monasteries enjoyed criminal immunity so that often dubious characters looked for shelter there. Observers and critics saw this as an indication that in the year 1052 the last days of the world—as announced in Buddhist texts—had actually set in, that is to say, the time of a progressive disintegration of Buddhist doctrine and

practice. This situation led several monks to turn their backs on the monasteries and to start looking for new forms of Buddhism, living as mountain-dwelling or wandering ascetics. They became the nuclei of what was later called Kamakura Buddhism.³ In addition, there was the influence of the once again strength-gaining military class: They wanted a reduction of the quite pronounced ritual system, simplicity and a limitation to the essentials. “With that the way was positively paved for a new religious movement that, in rebellion against the confusing and increasingly shallow superabundance of religious forms and the accompanying superior strength of the clergy, looked for a more simple approach that could be practised by every lay person and that would offer inner satisfaction at the same time.”⁴ Something similar is acknowledged by Christoph Kleine who confirms that Buddhism in the late 12th century was looking for closeness to the people and wanted to emancipate itself from the example set by the Chinese.⁵ The extent alone with which Kleine treats the Kamakura period in his voluminous work, about one half of the book, hints at the fact that here a paradigm shift in Buddhist history of religion is ascribed, in the same way Wilhelm Gundert saw here an important turning point which was affected by the change of political circumstances.

While since the end of the 12th century the political power was held by the *bakufu* (“tent government” as a term depicting the predominant regime of the military class that actually was in power) and the general at its top, the militarily successful Minamoto no Yoritomo had the Emperor award him the hereditary title *Sei-i Taishōgun*, in short *Shōgun*, in 1192, thereby effectively obtaining the power in the Japanese Empire which was to stay with the shoguns until the beginning of the Meiji period (1868). With that the political power of the military as well as its influence on the religious sphere were confirmed and secured. This became manifest, for example, when in the seventies and eighties of the 13th century the Mongols threatened Japan, to which the Imperial Court in Kyoto and the *bakufu* government reacted quite differently: the Emperor wanted to submit peacefully, whereas the military government reacted by rejecting the Mongolian delegation and by armament.

Religious Radical Change

The above-mentioned changes in the respective epochs differed considerably, but they were accompanied by structurally similar religious processes that can be characterized by the following aspects:

- a beginning dissolution of the paradigm of celibate monastic life;

- a stronger orientation towards the sources;
- a denouncement of the deplorable state of affairs in the traditional Buddhist schools;
- a greater closeness to the people; a watering down of the separation between the clergy and the laity.

Two central figures representing these changes were Nichiren, originally a monk of the Tendai School, in Japan and the Christian theologian and monk Martin Luther in Central Europe. In the following these two will be portrayed biographically and their basic thoughts will be explained and compared. The comparison will have to bear in mind that not only the historical situations, in which the two characters acted, were completely different; likewise that there may be structural similarities in the religious biographies and also in terms of content, but that there may also exist opposing accents that will resist a comparison.

Nichiren

According to common estimation, Nichiren was born on 16 February 1222 on the Boso peninsula (Awa province) in the village of Kominato at the Pacific coast. As this estimation is made according to a calendar of the lunar year, it can be assumed that it was on 30 March 1222 of the solar year (Julian calendar). His origin and birth—like those of other religious founders—are shrouded in legends. According to one hagiography⁶, the marriage of his parents, the announcement of his birth in one of his mother's dreams and his birth being a manifestation of an eternal Buddha are pre-conditioned events. However, some aspects of his childhood and youth are astonishing, should he actually have been the son of a humble fisherman's family: the traditional education he received until the age of twelve; the studies in different temples also outside his home village; pupils and followers also from the ranks of knights and princes and the circles of government officials as well as the support of influential families.⁷

In some of his works Nichiren himself points out that he was born into a '*chandāla*' family (in *Letter from Sado*, 1272, and in *Banishment to Sado*, 1271), a term from India hinting at a low caste or even the class outside of the caste system ("untouchables"), that is, a social group at the fringes of society.⁸ By his adoptive parents, Nukina Shigetada and Umegiku, Nichiren was given the name Yakuōmaru accompanied by the aristocratic name Zennichimaro; and at the age of twelve he was entrusted to the Seichō-ji temple, which belonged to a branch of the Tendai School, in order to receive a monastic education. At the age of fifteen he

was ordained and received the name Zeshō-bō Renchō.⁹ That Nichiren was educated in an institution of the Tendai School was not unusual at that time; moreover, he became familiarized with different practices rather more typical of other schools, i.e. that of the mantric prayer to the Buddha Amida.¹⁰

Even in his early years, Nichiren seems to have been driven by an intensive desire to seek the truth, a desire which finally, many years later, was fulfilled by the Lotus Sutra.¹¹ Here perhaps a first comparison with Martin Luther is possible who, too, during his early studying years as a monk staying at the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt (1505–1508), was driven by the tormenting question “How do I get hold of a merciful God?” and for whom this question—in opposition to the theological trend of his time—became the central theological struggle for truth. In a letter Nichiren refers to the decision to turn to Buddhist monastic life he made in his youth. He explains this decision with his astonishment at the fact that great wise men and saints—despite their being in a state of salvation—do not have a relaxed and peaceful expression at death, but one that is characterized by agony. As a result of the doubts he developed regarding this observation, he decided to leave his home in Awa behind and to choose life as a monk.¹² This decision for a life dedicated to Buddhism, which induces him first to turn to Amida Buddhism, can be compared with Luther’s decision who—presumably owing to experiencing a violent thunderstorm—decided to become a monk in 1505.

For further studies Nichiren goes to Kamakura, he then returns to the Kiyosumi-dera, and during that time he distances himself from the teachings of Pure Land Buddhism (Jōdo) because these rejected the Lotus Sutra as being too difficult for the people. In 1243, at the age of 21, he travels to Kyoto, to the Hieizan, the mountain with the old training centre of the Tendai School northeast of Kyoto, where he spends the next ten years studying intensively, including numerous teachings and practices of different schools of Japanese Buddhism and their methods, such as asceticism, practising nothing but meditation, and several practices of esoteric Buddhism. Nichiren uses the closeness to other important Buddhist places to get to know and study these, too (Kegon in Nara, Shingon at the Koya-san and others). During his time on the Hieizan he got the impression that in the Tendai School, too, the unique esteem of the Lotus Sutra had been reduced due to diverse syncretistic influences; and he wanted to return to the original teachings of T’ien-t’ai Ta-Shih and to concentrate, even more radically than T’ien T’ai, exclusively on the Lotus Sutra.¹³

The Key Event for the Nichiren Movement

In 1253 Nichiren returned to his home temple Seichō-ji where—after having spent seven days secluded in a nearby forest—at midday of 28 April he called together the priests and villagers. Before doing so, he had recited the Sino-Japanese opening line of the Lotus Sutra (*namu myōhō renga kyō*) while looking at the sun rising over the Pacific. Then he announced his teachings, namely that all teachings of Buddhism were contained in the Lotus Sutra and that the Lotus Sutra had to be regarded as the one and foremost true book of Buddhist teachings. Moreover, that the opening line (*namu myōhō renga kyō*) was a symbolic summary of the doctrine and the recitation of this line a completely valid Buddhist practice. Nichiren distanced himself explicitly from the Pure Land School and its *nembutsu* practice, that is, the prayer to the Buddha Amida with the mantra *namu amida butsu*. Rather, *nembutsu* would be the path to the hell of never-ending suffering and not a way towards salvation.¹⁴ On this occasion he gave himself the name Nichiren 日蓮 which consists of the characters for sun and lotus. Nichiren did not leave anybody out in his preaching—“There was none who was not offended by his bold proclamation and fierce attack.”¹⁵

The regional prince Tōjō Kagenobu, a follower and sponsor of Pure Land Buddhism, was outraged and tried to get hold of Nichiren. From then on, Nichiren was on the run; he was helped by his former abbot Dōzen.¹⁶ This event is seen as the starting point of the religious revolution set off by Nichiren; and it can be structurally compared to the event of Luther’s posting his 95 theses on the door of the All Saints’ Church (Palatial Church) in Wittenberg. Concerning Luther, we are similarly confronted with a two-stage process: his fundamental option for a life dedicated to theology and the monastic life (1505), and his developing reformatory insight since 1517.

Parallels can be seen between Nichiren’s uncompromising choice of the Lotus Sutra and his interpretation of its opening line, on the one hand, and Luther’s *sola scriptura* and *solus Christus*, on the other hand. Before I finally turn to a more intensive study of Luther, I would like to discuss Nichiren’s philosophy regarding the important work of Mahayana Buddhism and his understanding of the Daimoku, its opening line.

Important for Nichiren is the theme of faith: “The Lotus Sutra, wherein the Buddha honestly discarded expedient means, says that one can ‘gain entrance through faith alone’. And the Nirvana Sutra, which the Buddha preached in the grove of sal trees on the last day of his life, states, ‘Although there are innumerable practices that lead to enlighten-

ment, if one teaches faith, then that includes all those practices.' This faith is the basic requirement for entering the way of the Buddha. In the fifty-two stages of bodhisattva practice, the first ten stages, dealing with faith, are basic, and the first of these ten stages is that of arousing pure faith."¹⁷ Deep and impassioned is Nichiren's faith in the one Buddha of the Lotus Sutra, which makes it for him all the less understandable how people can turn to the other, the Buddha Amida: "Now the Buddha is like the masses of clouds, his teachings are like the heavy rain, and the withered plants and trees are like all living beings. When they are watered by the rain of the Buddhist teachings and observe the five precepts, the ten good precepts, and the meditational practices, all of which bring merit, they will put forth blossoms and bear fruit."¹⁸ In Nichiren's religious philosophy there join the faith in the Buddha of the Lotus Sutra, in the sense of overwhelmingly skilful means (*upaya*), in the effect of the Buddhist teachings (like "heavy rain on fertile soil"), and in the effect of the recitation ("chanting") of the Daimoku, in which the entire teachings of Buddha are contained symbolically. With the belief in the power of the mantra, however, he was at least methodically close to the *nembutsu* practice of Amida Buddhism.

He rejected all forms of Buddhism not strictly aimed at the (historical) Buddha of the Lotus Sutra as being syncretistic and held the faithfulness to the one and only true Buddha to be the one criterion for the well-being of the country. In his first work on the subject of his new message, the *Risshōankokuron* (On Establishing The Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land)¹⁹, which he presented to Prince Hōjō Tokiyori on 16 July 1260, written in the form of a fictional dialogue between a "guest" and his "host", he develops his view of the state of affairs and the increasing disintegration of Buddhism and the country which he sees to be causally related to the religious, social and political situation. This is made quite clear even at the beginning of his text: "In recent years there have been unusual disturbances in the heavens, strange occurrences on earth, famine and pestilence, all affecting every corner of the empire and spreading throughout the land. Oxen and horses lie dead in the streets, and the bones of the stricken crowd the highways. Over half the population has already been carried off by death, and there is hardly a single person who does not grieve."²⁰ Nichiren recognizes the signs of the last days of the Dharma (*mappō*); but he does not only identify signs that hint at a more complicated or even impossible access to the teachings of Buddhism, he actually sees the whole country affected by this. In the style of establishing proof with the help of sutra texts, he verifies his observations with a quotation from the Great Collection

Sutra: “The Great Collection Sutra says: ‘When the teachings of the Buddha truly become obscured and lost, then people will all let their beards, hair, and fingernails grown long, and the laws of the world will be forgotten and ignored. At that time, loud noises will sound in the air, and the earth will shake; everything in the world will begin to move as though it were a waterwheel. City walls will split and tumble, and all houses and dwellings will collapse’.”²¹ Here a close link between the disintegration of the Buddhist teachings and events happening in nature and society is formulated.

In the *Risshō-ankokuron* Nichiren also predicted a foreign invasion as a consequence of the religious confusion of the Japanese; for him this prediction seemed to become true when in 1268 a Mongolian delegation came to Japan for the first time, requesting the Japanese people to submit.²² This close link between the propagation of the Dharma and natural and political processes is something specific for the patriotic prophet Nichiren, who was concerned with the well-being of his country. Martin Luther’s interests were first of all of a theological nature, but he and Nichiren share a great rhetoric and personal disposition.

Martin Luther

Martin Luther (1483–1546) is a central part, but not the one and only focal point of a reformatory process which, according to Thomas Kaufmann, has to be assessed by criteria of church sociology rather than theologically.²³ He was born 1483 in Eisleben; his family came from a “thriving urban-bourgeois milieu”.²⁴ His father Hans Luder was a mine entrepreneur, and a higher education and an influential professional position were probably open to Martin Luther.²⁵ The expectations the father had for his son, however, were connected with law studies and were later disrupted by the legendary event that happened to Luther in 1505: a thunderstorm with lightning on an open field in which course Luther vowed to become a monk, should he survive this thunderstorm, thereby renouncing to law studies. This fundamental turn in his life was followed by joining the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt and his straight theological development in agreement with the Augustinian order. Luther was granted a career as professor of theology which, however, collided with his theological investigation of how man can become righteous in the sight of God and thus can find “a merciful God”, but also with his criticism of the custom of granting indulgences: Due to reasons concerning church policy, after his going public with his 95 theses relating to indulgence traffic on 31 October 1517, he was released from the

vow to obedience by the head of the Augustinian order, Johann von Staupitz, in October 1518. In fact, Johann von Staupitz had been the driving force behind Luther's studying in Wittenberg and his doctorate in theology in 1512 as well as Luther's becoming Staupitz's successor as chair of the department "Lectura in Biblia" (Exegesis of the Bible).²⁶ In 1514 Luther had been appointed provincial curate of the order, thus attaining an important leading position besides his teaching duties. It is assumed that the reformatory insight that man will be "righteous" in sight of God by faith alone, that is to say, that man is granted the grace of God, grew out of an intensive reflection on Romans 1:17; however, the exact date of this insight remains contested. In the following years the scope of Luther's theology grows: his criticism of the use of Aristotelian thought in scholastic theology, his use of the anti-Pelagian writings of Augustine, his criticism of the sacraments and their reduction to baptism and the Eucharist, and the concentration of his theology on the two dialectically connected sentences "A Christian is a free man above all things and not subjugated to anyone" and "A Christian is a loyal servant of all things and subjugated to everyone" in his work "A Treatise on Christian Liberty" of 1520. Luther did not see his theological and ecclesiastical fight as some quarrel amongst many, but recognized himself to be in an apocalyptic fight of the Gospel against Satan and the pope as his Antichrist.²⁷ With this self-assumed role he was not far from Nichiren for whom his religious and political activities were set into a scenario of the last days of the Dharma, too.

Luther's Most Important Concerns

Next to the central insight that man cannot be righteous in the sight of God because of his or her merits, but only by the grace of God and faith in God alone, Luther basically pursued the following issues:

- (1) Parallel to concerns of Humanism, Luther dared to criticize the current form of the holy church only in the name of an authority that was *older* than church customs. This criterion could only be met by the Bible itself, to which Luther would return as the cornerstone of all of his later developments. In the Bible he found the older tradition and therefore the unadulterated and more appropriate practice of Christian life. He held the view that the aspects of current practice that were not compatible with the witness of the Bible could be legitimately criticized.
- (2) The principle of the Bible being self-interpreting. Even if Luther,

according to his own understanding, could make use of the Bible as a document of divine revelation in his criticism of the current exegetic practice and the church, his interpretation of the scripture was challenged by important authorities of his time. The doctrine of the church, represented by councils and the papacy, was maintained to be infallible. He countered this claim by saying that councils and popes could be mistaken, too. The church's claim to be the institution that held the monopoly on interpreting the Bible was disputed by Luther theologically by saying that the nature of the Holy Scripture was a divinely inspired document of revelation. His central thesis maintains that the Holy Scripture is interpreting itself. To understand the scripture one doesn't need the doctrine of the church but scripture-immanent hermeneutics. This principle leads to the next.

- (3) The principle 'Every Christian is an interpreter'. If the Holy Scripture interprets itself, then it follows that every Christian who reads the Bible attentively and appeals to the Holy Spirit for help in understanding the Bible is able to understand the content of the biblical texts *independently*. Every believer in Christ is an interpreter of the scripture because God's word addresses all people, regardless of any man-made hierarchy. From this principle there also follows the principle of the universal priesthood of believers.
- (4) The principle of the centre of the scripture. Luther's hermeneutics concerning the scripture has a philological aspect as Luther stresses the importance of the fact that each biblical book has first of all to be understood in its context. At the same time Luther was also convinced that the Bible had its own "central theme" so that not all of the texts were equally significant. As a uniting principle he put forward that the Old and the New Testament were about *that what could be found of Christ behind every biblical text* (German: *Das, was Christum treibet*). From this centre, in terms of content, also such passages had to be understood the meaning of which was hard to understand. A further principle said that in such a case the "dark" (that is: incomprehensible) passages had to be elucidated with the help of the "light" (comprehensible) ones.
- (5) The consequences relating to the use of media. These hermeneutical principles also had an impact on *the use of media* concerning the Reformation set in motion by Luther. Therefore, and in accordance with the above-mentioned principles, it was important and consistent that Luther translated the Bible into German in order to make it accessible to each and every Christian person, and namely in as

direct a way as possible (by reading or by reading it out loud to others). The Reformation gave a boost to the production and dissemination of new forms of literature, i.e. pamphlets, sermons, and tracts. Education became the trademark of the churches of the Reformation period; worship services ceased to be held in Latin but were delivered in German or other local languages in other regions.

- (6) The mental consequences. It is easy to comprehend that Luther's hermeneutical principles also had far-reaching social consequences. There is a trend that the institution of the church as a place of salvation and teaching authority is weakened; the relationship of the believer with the Holy Scripture and the independence of understanding lead to a considerable individualization. Therefore Friedrich Wilhelm Graf is right to point out the following: "At the beginning of all modern thrusts at individualization there exists that religious subjectivity culture that is rooted in Martin Luther's reformatory protest."²⁸

Scientific research rightly points out that Luther himself—similar to many "converts"—interpreted his own intellectual biography very much with regard to its contrasts. He also tended to especially describe his break with the Roman-Catholic church ("church of the Pope") as being purely the result of his biblical insights, although in many cases he actually did react to church related events. Instead of interpreting the—rather gradual—unfolding of his thinking as being caused by his reflection on historical developments as well as on developments concerning church policy, this process is narrowed to the short period of a "breakthrough" and portrayed as a contrasting "Before" and "After" by Luther.²⁹

Trying to Engage Nichiren and Luther in a Mutual Conversation

To start with the aspects that Nichiren and Luther do not share: Luther's life was, for the most part, the quiet life first of a monk and later of a professor of theology. Due to (sometimes even bodily) hostility towards him, Luther only had a small range of action; but from 1514 until the end of his life in 1546 he was permanently engaged as a scholar. Unlike Luther, Nichiren was persecuted by the authorities, spent some phases of his life in exile on the island of Sado and was condemned to death several times. The direct karmic link Nichiren identified between the wrong belief of the ruling powers and the people, the natural disasters

and the political fate of Japan was alien to Luther. His interventions in political matters—the Peasants' Wars, the Ottomans near Vienna—had a different background.

Nor did Nichiren deal with a religious community as closely connected with the state as late medieval Roman Catholicism, but he was confronted with the support which Amida Buddhism received by some dynasties of princes and which was growing stronger in the course of the 13th century. Where can some common ground between the two be found? In an outstanding way, both concerned themselves with a central text, the Lotus Sutra and the predominant position of the Buddha Shakyamuni, on the one hand; and the Holy Scripture before all church tradition, interpreted according to the principle of *that what could be found of Christ behind every biblical text*, on the other hand: the concentration on the One and only legitimate Buddha who according to Nichiren was not revered in Amida Buddhism; and Luther's criticism of diverse aberrations of the church tradition. Both of them underwent two stages: first their entering the religious life as monk, and later—within this monastic existence that enabled their respective thorough analysis of the religious community—their turn to concentrate on that what was being identified as the essential, hand in hand with a renewed level of reformatory thought. For Nichiren this has to be identified with his first entering the stage preaching at Seichō-ji in 1253; and for Luther in the progressive change of his views in the years between 1517 and 1520.³⁰ They are both influenced by apocalyptic ways of thinking. They are both self-confident, linguistically gifted and full of polemical energy.

The step from celibacy into marriage and the first "parsonage" of the church Nichiren did not take. Until his death he lived conforming to the rules of the Tendai monks. The one who broke with monastic celibate life was his older contemporary Shinran, who left the temple, married and adopted a status between laity and monasticism. Often, and also for other reasons, rather Shinran than Nichiren is compared with Luther because he was supposedly concerned with the theme of grace (of the Buddha Amida) out of pure faith.³¹ Also for Nichiren the belief in the true Buddha (not in the Buddha Amida of Pure Land Buddhism) is a central theme with karmic results for the believer; similarly, for Shinran belief was an effective behaviour influencing the believer's karma that found its expression in the mantra-worship of the Buddha Amida, which would be repaid by the "grace" of Amida. Shinran also used the term *sin*; however, there are doubts if the merciful Buddha Amida here really is thought as the representation of an external, transcendental power, but rather that it points to an externalized inner energy of the human being.

In this case, Shinran would not be very far from original Buddhist thought and rather remote from Luther and, in that sense, Nichiren who referred to the historical Buddha could more easily be a dialogue partner of Luther.

However, it has definitely to be taken into consideration that a comparison—like the one which was drawn here—does not take into account the numerous hermeneutical obstacles of alleged historical compatibilities and that it only discusses a few selected characteristics. Whole worlds of different cultural, social and political contexts have not been taken into consideration here. And quite deliberately a narrative of a possible dialogue has been employed which can make possible a comprehending look into the past, and facilitate an intercultural and interreligious exchange in the present and future.

(translated from the German original by Andrea Ehlers)

Notes

¹ Cf. Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt—Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, München 2011, Introduction. Osterhammel, against postmodernist scepticism, deliberately employs the method of the “master narrative” in order to facilitate a conclusive interpretation of historiography.

² Cf. George Sansom, *A History of Japan to 1334*, Rutland/Tokyo: Tuttle 1974 (1963), 139–177.

³ Cf. Oliver Freiburger/Christoph Kleine, *Buddhismus. Handbuch und kritische Einführung*, Göttingen 2011, 151.

⁴ Cf. Wilhelm Gundert, *Japanische Religionsgeschichte*, Stuttgart 1943 (Tokyo 1935), 82.

⁵ Cf. Christoph Kleine, *Der Buddhismus in Japan*, Tübingen 2011, 232 [translated by the author of this text].

⁶ Mentioned in Yukio Matsudo, *Nichiren, der Ausübende des Lotos-Sūtra*, Norderstedt: Books on Demand 2004, 48: A biographical document of Nichiren himself is supposed to have passed on to his most important pupil Nikkō.

⁷ Cf. Matsudo 2004, 48f.

⁸ So in his “Letter from Sado”: “... How much more true this is of Nichiren, who in this life was born poor and lowly to a chandāla family” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Editor-Translator: The Gosho Translation Committee, Soka Gakkai, Tokyo 1999, 303), and in the text “Banishment to Sado”: “Nichiren is the son of a chandāla family who lived near the sea in Tōjō in Awa Province, in the remote countryside of the eastern part of Japan” (ibid. 202).

⁹ Cf. *The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism*, Soka Gakkai, Tokyo 2002, 439.

¹⁰ Cf. Margareta von Borsig, *Leben aus der Lotosblüte. Nichiren Shōnin: Zeuge Buddhas, Kämpfer für das Lotos-Gesetz, Prophet der Gegenwart*, Freiburg i.Br. 1976, 42.

¹¹ Cf. von Borsig 1976, 42f.

¹² Cf. Matsudo 2004, 65f. Matsudo refers to Nichiren’s reply to the lay nun Myōhō (*The Writings*, 1105f.), in which, however, the mentioned passage is not included. The

similar content can be found in “The Importance of the Moment of Death (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin Volume II*, Tokyo: Soka Gakkai 2006, 759f.), which says, “Looking back, I have been studying the Buddha’s teachings since I was a boy. And I found myself thinking, ‘The life of a human being is fleeting. The exhaled breath never waits for the inhaled one. Even dew before the wind is hardly a sufficient metaphor. It is the way of the world that whether one is wise or foolish, old or young, one never knows what will happen to one from one moment to the next. Therefore I should first of all learn about death, and then about other things.’” However, it also does not clearly say that this is the reason that he became a priest.

¹³ Cf. *The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism* 2002, 439f.

¹⁴ Cf. Matsudo 2004, 90.

¹⁵ Masaharu Anesaki, *Nichiren the Buddhist Prophet*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1949, 34.

¹⁶ Cf. von Borsig 1976, 64f.; Matsudo 2004, 89–92; Anesaki 1949, 33–35.

¹⁷ The Daimoku of the Lotus Sutra, in: *The Writings*, 141–154, 141.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 148.

¹⁹ On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land, in: *The Writings*, 6–32.

²⁰ *The Writings*, 6.

²¹ *The Writings*, 8.

²² Cf. The Postscript to “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” *The Writings*, 31; Matsudo 2004, 96f.

²³ Kaufmann: “By Reformation I understand—carried out through a conscious disassociation from the Roman Church and a break with the current legal bases of its canonical law—the processes of reorganizing the nature of the church in urban and territorial contexts, and the partly private, but mostly public acts of communication, especially the so-called pamphlet journalism, that initiated these processes in part or accompanied them in part, and the political, juridical and military quarrels that took place on different levels and stages of the cities, territories and regions, of the empire, and Europe and that were inseparably connected to these processes. Therefore the Reformation first of all does not indicate a certain theological insight of Luther in the course of his theological development which has to be interpreted in terms of a process ...” [translated by the author of this text] (Thomas Kaufmann, *Geschichte der Reformation*, Frankfurt a.M./Leipzig 2009, 22).

²⁴ Kaufmann 2009, 128.

²⁵ “Luther” is another variation of the name “Luder”.

²⁶ Cf. Otto Hermann Pesch, *Hinführung zu Luther*, Mainz: Grünewald 1982; Kaufmann 2009, 130f.

²⁷ Cf. Volker Leppin, *Martin Luther*, Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchgesellschaft 2006; Dietrich Korsch/Volker Leppin (eds.), *Martin Luther—Biographie und Theologie*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2010; Volker Leppin, Martin Luther, in: Markus Vinzent (ed.), *Metzler Lexikon Christlicher Denker*, Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler 2000, 446–451.

²⁸ Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, Der Protestantismus, in: H. Joas/K. Wiegandt (eds.), *Säkularisierung und die Weltreligionen*, Frankfurt a.M. 2007, 78–124, 99 [translated by the author of this text]. Regarding the six features discussed in the above paragraph, I follow Henning Wrogemann, Eine islamische “Reformation”? –Islamische Debatten um Religion und Zivilgesellschaft und die Frage der Schrifthermeneutik, in: Michael Biehl/Ulrich Dehn, *Reformationen: Momentaufnahmen aus einer globalen Bewegung*,

Hamburg 2015, 157–172, here 159–161.

²⁹ Cf. Kaufmann 2009, 131f.; Leppin 2000, 447.

³⁰ Here I deliberately do not refer to the event of the so-called posting of his 95 theses on the door of the Palatial Church of Wittenberg on 31 October 1517, protesting against the sale of indulgences, the historicity of which is contested and which has more precisely to be seen as a symbol rather than a true focal point in terms of content of Luther's reformatory thought.

³¹ Tatsuo Oguro, *Der Rettungsgedanke bei Shinran und Luther—Eine religionsvergleichende Untersuchung*, Hildesheim: Olms 1985; Martin Kraatz (ed.), *Luther und Shinran—Eckhart und Zen*, Köln: Brill 1989; Jan van Bragt, *Buddhismus, Jōdo Shinshū, Christentum: Schlägt Jōdo Shinshū eine Brücke zwischen Buddhismus und Christentum?* in: Elisabeth Gössmann/Günter Zobel (eds.), *Das Gold im Wachs* (FS Thomas Immoos), München: Iudicium 1988.

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