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メタデータ	言語: eng 出版者: 室蘭工業大学 公開日: 2011-03-24 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): Imagination Jesus, Selfhood, Satan, God 作成者: 安藤, 栄子 メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10258/545">http://hdl.handle.net/10258/545</a>

# William Blake's Religious World

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(原稿受付日 平成22年5月26日 論文受理日 平成22年12月7日)

## Abstract

In Christianity, man inherits original sin and is considered to live a sinful existence. Because of sin, man is separated from God. Contrary to this view, William Blake, although born in the Orthodox Christian world, did not take sin so seriously. According to Blake, it is Selfhood, not sin, that destroys humanity. In this point, he seems to differ from Christianity. Selfhood identified with Satan, or Spectre, destroys the harmonious unification of God, man and nature. That unification is the most important and uppermost mental stage for Blake and he defined it as Imagination, which could be recognized as *satori* or enlightenment in Buddhism.

Key words: Imagination Jesus, Selfhood, Satan, God

## 1. INTRODUCTION

William Blake (1757-1827), an English poet, painter and mystic, was born into the Western Christian World, but he seemed to resist the prevalent Christian beliefs of his time, moreover to have the different view from Christianity. Blake's thought seems to be similar to Buddhism. I would like to mention it later in this paper. In Christianity, there is a rigid hierarchy with God on top, angels and saints subordinated under Him, and man cannot but feel the difference between himself and God—an unbridgeable gap. The Bible says "man is the image of God", but never says "man is God". Nevertheless, Jesus Christ is an exception. He is the perfect man and He is the incarnate God to redeem sinful people. He was crucified and resurrected, and by overcoming death and sin He showed the way for people to return to God. In Christianity, God transcends all in the universe and exists outside of it and rules it. Blake was brought up believing in all that, but he said the following:

The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses calling them by the names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their

enlarged & numerous senses could perceive.

And particularly they studied the genius of each city & country, placing it under its mental deity;

Till a system was formed, which some took advantage of, & enslav'd the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from their objects: thus began Priesthood;

Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales. And at length they pronounc'd that the Gods had order'd such things.

Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast.

(*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, plate 11)

Even if this quotation may be regarded as polytheism or pantheism, Blake admired the ancient poets' supreme inspiration, which could see Gods in every existence in the universe. Blake pointed out that Priesthood was formed and deities were abstracted from objects and they were divided and after all "men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast." Thus Blake seemed not to admit that God exists outside man, he thought God lives in man. I would like to take up the examples describing immanent God, or "man is God":

‘If thou humbles thyself, thou humblest me:  
 ‘thou also dwellest in Eternity,  
 ‘Thou art a Man; God is no more,  
 ‘Thine own Humanity learn to adore.’  
 (*The Everlasting Gospel*, C)

He who sees the Infinite in all things, sees God. He  
 who sees Ratio only,  
 sees himself only. Therefore God becomes as we  
 are, that we may be as he is.  
 (*There is No Natural Religion. Application*)

“The worship of  
 God is: Honouring his gifts in other men, each  
 according to his  
 “genius, and loving the greatest men best: those who  
 envy or  
 “caluminate great men hate God;  
 for there is no other God.”  
 (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, plates 22-24)

God Appears & God is Light  
 To those poor Souls who dwell in Night,  
 But does a Human Form Display  
 To those who Dwell in realms of day.  
 (*Poems from Pickering Manuscript*)

Man is all Imagination. God is a Man & exists in us  
 & we in him.  
 (*Annotation to Berkeley's "Sirius"*)

And all must love the human form,  
 In heathen, Turk, or Jew;  
 Where Mercy, Love & Pity dwell  
 There God is dwelling too.  
 (*"The Divine Image", stanza 5*)

In Christianity, there seems to be the discrimination  
 between God and man; on the other hand in Blake we  
 could feel homogeneity between God and man.

Rephrase, J. G. Davies regards Blake as orthodox  
 although he knows Blake's bold ideas, and says:

“Despite such exaggerations, to which Blake was  
 always prone, his portrait of Jesus is at once both  
 fresh and stimulating, while his Christology, which  
 remains only in bold outlines, is in the main a  
 rephrasing of orthodox doctrine in the terms of his  
 own idiom.”<sup>1)</sup>

Naturally, some critics regard Blake as a heretic.  
 According to Mark Schorer, the eighteenth century was  
 the time of reason and transcendence of God became  
 unnoticeable. Immanence, or deification, became  
 conspicuous instead. He took Blake's deification as one  
 example:

“In Blake, deification is a ubiquitous attitude. ‘All  
 deities reside in the human’ is a bluntly beautiful way of  
 stating it; a more cryptic statement is this: ‘The desire  
 of Man being Infinite, the possession is Infinite &  
 himself Infinite... God becomes as we are, that we may  
 be as he is.’ Blake's Christ is not the Word becomes  
 Flesh, but the Flesh becomes the Word. His is not the  
 gentle divinity of orthodoxy, but the rebel angel,  
 identified in his most active moods with the figure of  
 Revolution itself, which Blake called Orc, a significant  
 anagram of the Latin word for heart. His Jesus is the  
 symbol not of God's grace but of man's eternal gift for  
 renewal. ‘The worship of God is: Honouring his gifts  
 in other men, each according to his genius, and loving  
 the greatest men best: those who envy or caluminate  
 great men, hate God: for there is no other God... if Jesus  
 is the greatest man, you ought to love him in the greatest  
 degree.’”<sup>2)</sup>

Schorer seems to insist that Blake should create his own  
 unique Jesus in order to show the rebirth of man by  
 neglecting orthodoxy. Nonetheless, Blake's deification  
 is not a shallow idea at all, but it seems to be a result of  
 his important thought.

## 2. THE EMANCIPATION OF BODY

In Christianity, the next world, heaven, is considered to  
 be the most important. It is said that people should  
 devote themselves completely to God and everything  
 would be given to them, and the way of entering into  
 heaven would be shown. On the other hand, Blake  
 seems to place the origin of his art and religion in this  
 world, not in the next world. Therefore, he pointed out  
 the errors committed by many religions including  
 Christianity, as follows:

1. That Man has two real existing principles: Viz: a  
 Body & a Soul.
2. That Energy, call'd Evil, is alone from the Body;  
 & that Reason, call'd Good, is alone from the  
 Soul.
3. That God will torment Man in Eternity for  
 following his Energies.  
 (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, “The voice of the  
 Devil”)

Religions pointing to Heaven think highly of soul,  
 reason, and goodness and push away bodily needs, and  
 evil. Such religions are based on the dualism of good  
 and evil moralities. They deny and abandon evil to  
 protect goodness; they always see only one side of things.  
 Contrary to them, Blake thinks highly of this world,  
 affirms body, energy, and passion, and praises them to  
 the highest degree as follows:

1. Man has no Body distinct from his Soul; for that

- call'd Body is a portion of Soul discern'd by the  
five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.
2. Energy is the only life, and is from the Body; and  
Reason is the bound or outward circumference  
of Energy.
  3. Energy is Eternal Delight.

(*op.cit.*)

Incidentally, this world which is filled with a variety of evils and sins may well be called hell. Blake praises body and passion and boldly admires arrogance, desire, lust, fury, excess, and destruction which in Christianity or moralities would be regarded as evil and denied.

In "Proverbs of Hell" of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* he writes:

The pride of the Peacock is the glory of God.  
The lust of the Goat is the bounty of God.  
The wrath of the Lion is the Wisdom of God.  
The nakedness of woman is the work of God.  
The roaring of lions, the howling of wolves, the  
raging of the stormy sea, and the  
destructive sword, are proportions of eternity, too  
great for the eye of man.  
You never know what is enough unless you know  
what is more than enough.  
Exuberance is Beauty.  
Enough! or Too Much.  
The cistern contains: the fountain overflows.  
Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse  
unacted desires.

Moreover, Blake sees Jesus as an impulsive sinner breaking the Ten Commandments in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

"I tell you, no virtue can exist without breaking  
these ten  
"commandments Jesus was all virtue, and acted  
from impulse, not  
"from rules."

Blake's ideas continued for twenty five years and were again revealed in *The Everlasting Gospel* as follows:

- b. Was Jesus Gentle? or did he  
Give any marks of Gentility?
- c. d. Was Jesus Humble? or did he  
Give any proofs of Humility?
- e. Was Jesus Chaste? or did he  
Give any Lessons of Chastity?
- i. Was Jesus born of a Virgin Pure  
With narrow Soul & looks demure?  
If he intended to take on Sin  
The Mother should have an Harlot been,  
Just such a one as Magdalen  
With seven devils in her Pen;

Gentility, Humility, and Chastity are the traditional virtues of Jesus and Mary. Blake has broken these traditional images completely. Instead, he described them as common people, who are likely to give in to lust and suffer from jealousy and hatred. Blake not only wanted to resist the established religion through proposing a rebel-like Jesus, what he really wants to show us is that salvation is prepared for everybody without discrimination.

### 3. THE WORLD OF IMAGINATION

Next, I would like to describe how Blake's rebel-like Jesus is God and moreover, how he is identified with Imagination.

The Eternal Body of Man is The Imagination,  
that is, God himself,  
The divine Body, Jesus; we are his Members.  
(*The Laocoön*)

Man is all Imagination. God is a Man & exists in us  
& we in him.  
(*Annotation to Berkeley's "Sirius"*)

He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God. He who  
sees the Ratio only, sees himself only.

Therefore God becomes as we are, that we may be as he  
is. ("*There is no Natural Religion*", *Application*)

If the doors of perception were cleansed every  
thing would appear to man as it is, infinite.  
(*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, plate 14)

The above quotations show that as long as man expands  
his senses fully and flies to the world of Imagination, he  
can be one in God. This concept is not Christian, but is  
unique to Blake. Man who is destined to live in this  
world could live in Eternity beyond time and space.

Furthermore Imagination is such a vast and boundless  
world.

For all are Men in Eternity, Rivers, Mountains,  
Cities, Villages,  
All are Human, & when you enter into their  
Bosoms you walk  
In Heavens & Earths, as in your Bosom you bear  
your heaven  
And Earth & all you behold; tho' it appears Without,  
it is Within,  
In your Imagination, of which this World of  
Mortality is but a Shadow.  
(*Jerusalem* 71)

Imagination, the real & eternal World of which this  
Vegetable Universe is but a faint shadow, & in  
which we shall live in our Eternal Or Imaginative

Bodies when these Vegetable Mortal Bodies are no more.

(*ibid.*, 77)

According to Blake, everything in the universe seems to exist outside of us, but once we awake to Imagination, we can immediately know that everything exists in our mind. In other words, nature—rivers, mountains, and flowers—becomes us. The same mysterious experiences are described in the letter to Thomas Butts (1800) as follows:

The Light of the morning  
 Heaven's mountains Adorning  
 In particles bright  
 The jewels of Light  
 Distinct shone & clear  
 Amaz'd & in fear  
 I each particle gazed,  
 Astonish'd, Amazed:  
 For each was a Man  
 Human-form'd. Swift I ran,  
 For they beckon'd to me  
 Remote by the Sea.  
 Saying: Each grain of Sand,  
 Every Stone on the Land,  
 Each rock & each hill,  
 Each fountain & rill  
 Each herb & each tree,  
 Mountain, hill, earth & sea,  
 Cloud, Meteor, & Star,  
 Are Men Seen Afar.

Blake observes that every particle of the morning light is glittering like a jewel. He also shows that every particle of mountain, tree, hill, fountain, each rock, herb, and a grain of sand is a man. Once awakened in Imagination, man would be unified with everything in nature to the utmost. Finally, man comes to recognize that lifeless things, or inorganic matter, in nature have the same senses and feeling as human beings.

Concerning the city Blake also seems to consider it to be a human-being. London, the city in England, speaks to his friend Albion representing England and man:

“Return, Albion, return! I give myself for thee”.

(*Jerusalem* 38)

London speaks to Albion as a man and gives up his life for Albion's rebirth. In Imagination everything in the universe talks to everything else like humans, and lives for others, not for himself. It is a warm and harmonized world. In the Bible the relationship between God and man is focused on sin and redemption. On the other hand, Blake seems to think of God not only in connection with man but also in connection with everything in the universe equally. He sees God or Infinity even in a poor wild flower or a grain of sand.

To see a World in a grain of sand,  
 And Heaven in a wild flower,  
 Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,  
 And Eternity in an hour.

(*Auguries of Innocence ll.* 1-4)

Furthermore, Blake develops his dynamic thinking of Imagination or God as follows:

Then those who in Great Eternity met in the  
 Council of God As one Man, for contracting their  
 exalted Senses They behold Multitude, or  
 Expanding they behold as one, As One Man all the  
 Universal family; & that One Man They call Jesus  
 the Christ, & they in him & he in them Live in  
 Perfect harmony, in Eden the land of life,  
 Consulting as One Man above (Mount Gilead *del.*)  
 the Mountain of Snowdon Sublime.

(*The Four Zoas*, Night the First)

It is said that many people would gather to attend “the Council of God” in Eternity. It would be very important that they met not separately but were unified as “One Man”. “One Man” is Jesus Christ and means “Universal Family”. Who does he refer to when he says, “those who in Great Eternity met in the Council of God” in the first line? Naturally, they are people. But it should be remembered that Blake considers everything in the universe as equal to human existence in Imagination. Therefore “those who” would mean every existence in the world, including man. These many things are unified as the universal family or one man. This means that Jesus is the only life to support them and communicates with them very intimately. Really, Jesus exists in them. But if Jesus were only immanent, He might be absorbed in everything. In this case everything in the universe might be called godliness; it would be absurd. Blake emphasizes not only immanence, but also emphasizes Jesus as One Man or the Universal Family. Jesus would be a strong magnetic power to unify and embrace everything as a family. This power to unify a variety of existences in the universe would show that Jesus transcends everything. Living in Imagination means to understand both God's immanence and transcendence at one time.

Shorer pointed out that Blake was interested only in deification not in incarnation, that he described only the immanent not the transcendental. But in Blake we could see a transcendental Jesus who unifies everything. In Orthodox Christianity, incarnation means that God became Man and it was realized only once in Jesus Christ. On the other hand, for Blake, it is not a rare thing that God becomes man and other things. Incarnation could occur anytime in Imagination, according to Blake. Moreover, Shorer pointed out that Blake's Jesus was quite similar to Blake's Orc who symbolizes a revolutionary power, specifically French Revolution.



Indeed, Blake's Jesus deviates from the orthodox Jesus. Blake describes a passionate and impulsive Jesus, but it does not mean that his Jesus is identified with his Orc, who is only a destructive power. The reason why Blake describes Jesus as a passionate sinner might be that there must be a way to salvation without denying passions and desires which sometimes are connected with sins.

The most important thing is that passions and desires should be separated from egoism and become unselfish and unified with altruism. Blake's Jesus as true love, symbolizes innocence itself, while Orc is a selfish energy seeking his own benefit. Therefore, Orc would remain a lower level energy and incompatible with Blake's Jesus at all.

By the way, it seems abrupt to refer to Wordsworth here, but it might help us to understand Blake's Imagination. Blake seemed to be interested in the poems of William Wordsworth (1770-1850) and wrote in the margin on "Poems referring to the period of childhood" as follows:

I see in Wordsworth the Natural Man rising up against the Spiritual Man Continually & then he is No Poet but a heathen Philosopher at enmity against all true Poetry or Inspiration.<sup>3)</sup>

Blake referred to two types of man, that is, "the Spiritual Man" ("a true Poet") and "the Natural Man" ("a heathen Philosopher") and clearly considered Wordsworth as "the Natural Man". I wonder what Blake wanted to say in the above passage. Imagination, or Jesus Christ was his greatest inspiration through his life as a painter and a poet. In other words, Blake could find Jesus Christ in nature and communicate with Him. This was a quite direct and earnest experience. Blake insists on the unification of man and nature saying "Where man is not, nature is barren" ("Proverbs of Hell"). For Blake, Imagination is the most important factor for the true poet; on the other hand, Wordsworth requires five elements when writing poems: observation and description, sensibility, reflection, Imagination and fancy, and invention<sup>4)</sup>. Both, Blake and Wordsworth, love nature and seek the supernatural through nature. Nevertheless, Blake probably cannot sympathize with Wordsworth's reasonable, logical, and detached attitude towards nature and God. In other words, Blake cannot find any sincere organic unification among man, nature and God in Wordsworth. From the standpoint of Blake's Christianity, Wordsworth seems a heathen and a distant, stoic philosopher, not a poet.

#### 4. FALL FROM IMAGINATION

Incidentally, what is the opposite world of Imagination? It has been already shown in *Jerusalem* 71 and 77. It was

called "this World of Mortality", "a Shadow", and "Vegetable Universe". In the Bible, Adam and Eve lost Eden by disobeying God's order. John Milton (1608-74) borrowed an idea from the Bible and wrote *Paradise Lost*. And Blake followed the great poet and tried to write his own *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. In the Bible, original sin committed by Adam was inherited by his descendants. Therefore, man would be considered sinful by nature. To rescue mankind from sin, God was born in this world and crucified on the cross, but was resurrected from the dead and finally he conquered death and sin. Man was rescued by Jesus' self-sacrifice and this holy event occurred only once in history. On the other hand, in Blake, man can awaken to Imagination or Eternity, but he is easily apt to fall into the world bound by time and space which is called "this World of Mortality", a false and shadowy world, tedious and lifeless. The passage from Imagination to the World of Mortality and back is prepared for all human beings. Blake proclaims as follows:

Daughter of Beulah, Sing  
His fall into Division & his resurrection to Unity:  
His fall into the Generation of decay & death, & his  
Regeneration by the Resurrection from the dead.  
(*The Four Zoas*, Night the First)

"Division" forms a striking contrast with "Unity" in the quotation. This contrast is important. "Unity" symbolizes Imagination, because everything is unified with God in Imagination. On the other hand "Division" means the World of Mortality, where man is separated from everything in nature and God. The divided world is called Generation, which means decay and death. Generation, the isolated world means the real barren world. And according to Blake, the way to flee from the dead world is realized by "the Resurrection from the dead", that is, the Resurrection of Jesus. I would like to refer to this later. First, I want to show what Blake thinks of sin. In the Bible, man is said to be created in "the image of God", but at the same time man is considered a sinner. Man is destined to have two contrary aspects, but the dark side of the sinner is overemphasized and makes man suffer excessively.

Blake turns down man's tragic and dark destiny and says as follows;

Human Nature is the Image of God.  
(*Annotation to Lavater's Aphorisms on Man*)

Man is Born like a Garden ready planted and sown.  
This world is too poor to produce one seed.  
(*Annotation to Reynolds*)

For every thing that lives is Holy.  
(*"A Song of Liberty"*)

Blake seems to think that man is born perfect in this world. The Bible says that man is the image of God; but for Blake man does not remain an image of God. Blake says that man is God. The difference between these ideas seems great. Because Blake's Jesus is a passionate and impulsive man, we cannot find any sinfulness in Blake's man. Blake never mentions original sin in his works. But this does not always mean that Blake ignores sin or that he is careless about it. He himself confesses as follows:

I am perhaps the most sinful of men. I pretend not  
to holiness.  
(*Jerusalem* 3)

He is fully aware of sin, but there are traces of his making light of sin:

O Vala, what is Sin, that thou shudderest & weepst  
At sight of thy once lov'd Jerusalem? What is Sin  
but a little Error & fault that is soon forgiven?  
(*ibid.*, 20)

If Blake thinks of sin as "a little error or fault that is soon forgiven," man would be perfect. Blake seems to think another element destroys perfect humanity besides sin. What could it be? Blake says as follows:

Man is born a Spectre or Satan & is altogether an  
Evil, & requires a New Selfhood continually, &  
must continually be changed into his direct  
Contrary.  
But your Greek Philosophy (which is a remnant of  
Druidism) teaches that Man is Righteous in his  
Vegetated Spectre.  
(*ibid.*,52)

According to Blake, man is born perfect but he is also born as Satan. Satan is called Spectre, meaning Selfhood. It is this Selfhood, or self-centredness that destroys the unity with God, man and universe. Owing to the power of Selfhood, man is expelled from Eternity or Imagination. This is Blake's "Paradise Lost". Man cannot expand his senses any more because of self-centredness. For Blake, Selfhood or Satan is man's reasoning power, or rational power. Therefore, he is likely to depend on rule, common sense, and morality—they are logical and stable, while Imagination seems eccentric and unstable. After all, Imagination would be destroyed completely in the rational world. Blake describes the character of reason as follows:

But the Spectre, like a hoar frost & a Mildew, rose  
over Albion,  
Saying, "I am God, O Sons of Men! I am Rational  
power!  
"Am I not Bacon & Newton & Lock who teach

Humility to Man,  
"Who teach Doubt & Experiment? & my two  
Wings, Voltaire, Rousseau?"  
(*ibid.*,54)

The Spectre is the reasoning power in man, & when  
separated  
From Imagination and closing itself as in steel is a  
Ratio  
Of the things of Memory. It thence frames Laws &  
Moralties  
To destroy Imagination, the Divine Body, by  
Martyrdom & Wars.  
(*ibid.*, 74)

Man is the descendant of Adam who ate from the tree of knowledge, and is supposed to be reasonable by nature and is likely to be self-centred. Moreover, the eighteenth century is called the Age of Reason or Rationalism. Therefore, man cannot but fall into selfishness. Blake who can awake to Imagination, claims Bacon, Newton, Lock, Voltaire and Rousseau are the main culprits who drove man into selfishness. Humility, Gentility, and Chastity are only masks for the hypocrites who regard law and morality as the supreme God. This is quite similar to the Pharisees in Jesus' day. They regarded the Ten Commandments as supreme and were very self-righteous about it. They often labeled those who could not obey the law and punished them. As Jesus in the Bible often accused the Pharisees of hypocrisy, Blake accuses and attacks the rationalistic philosophers and scientists of the eighteenth century. They did not profess denial of selfhood, which Blake thinks most important. The Church was also influenced by rationalism. As a result, priests forget to love people, instead devoting themselves to accusing and punishing them. Blake tells us about their outrageous behaviour as follows:

I went to the Garden of Love,  
And Saw what I never had seen:  
A Chapel was built in the midst,  
Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of this Chapel were shut.  
And "Thou shalt not" writ over the door;  
So I turn'd to the Garden of Love  
That so many sweet flowers bore:

And I saw it was filled with graves,  
And tomb-stones where flowers should be:  
And Priests in black gowns were walking their  
rounds,  
And binding with briars my joys & desires.  
(*"The Garden of Love"*)

Blake says, "As the catterpillar chooses the fairest leaves to lay her eggs on, so the priest lays his curse on the fairest joys" (*"Proverbs of Hell"*). For Blake, priests

seemed to cast a curse on man and destroy his soul instead of loving and forgiving him. After all, they planted fear, constriction and selfishness in man's soul, just as the philosophers and scientists did.

Thy purpose & the purpose of thy priests & of thy  
Churches  
Is to impress on men the fear of death, to teach  
Trembling & fear, terror, constriction, abject  
selfishness.  
(Milton 43)

In order to flee from the hell of self-centredness, we cannot but depend on Jesus' death and resurrection. I would like to develop this point further on.

### 5. Return to Imagination

I have already commented on "The Death of Jesus" in "The Significance of 'To Tirzah'" (2008).<sup>5)</sup> It is referred to in the third and fourth stanzas of the poem:

Thou, Mother of my Mortal part,  
With cruelty didst mould my Heart,  
And with false self-deceiving tears  
Didst bind my Nostrils, Eyes, & Ears:

Didst close my Tongue in senseless clay,  
And me to Mortal Life betray.  
The Death of Jesus set me free:  
Then what have I to do with thee?

As seen from the above stanzas, the narrator had fallen into the limited world controlled by Tirzah, who is Selfhood. However, the narrator could rescue himself from the Tirzah-orientated world owing to the sacrificial death of Jesus. In Christianity, the death of Jesus means the Atonement or the Redemption. Jesus died in order to redeem people. His resurrection is a defeat of sin and erases the original sin. On the other hand, Blake does not agree with Orthodox Christianity. To him, the Death of Jesus means the "matchless self-sacrifice". In the poem the narrator imitated this self-sacrifice and returned to Imagination where he would come to know the importance of forgiveness of sins, instead of judging others. The Bible tells us that when the woman accused of adultery was ordered by the law of Moses to be stoned to death Jesus saved her. This is a scene of forgiveness, which impressed many artists including Blake. But Blake did not stop here; he went on to say "the Spirit of Jesus is continual forgiveness of Sin" (*Jerusalem* 3). And as I pointed out in "On Blake's *A Vision of the Last Judgment*" (2009)<sup>6)</sup>, Blake tried to portray this Jesus who forgives sins continually in *A Vision of the Last Judgment* (1810). In The Revelation, Jesus comes the second time to this world as a judge to punish sinners, who did not follow his teachings and throw them into hell, while he

rescues the so-called good people and allows them to enter into heaven. Blake clearly was suspicious of the Bible and said as follows:

Christ comes, as he came at first, to deliver those  
who were bound under Knave,  
not to deliver the Knave. He Comes to deliver Man,  
the Accused, & not Satan, the Accuser.  
(*A Vision of the Last Judgment*)

Blake who lived in the world of Christianity was conscious of sin, but more than that he could not but be fearful of the destructive power of Selfhood. It would be no exaggeration to say that he spent his life fighting with his enemy—Selfhood. Thus, his way of living seems to be closer to the Buddhistic way of living, not the Christian life.

The author is not an expert on Buddhism and wishes it to be known that to discuss Buddhism with words sometimes causes confusion. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this paper's conclusion I dare to say the following.

The principal image of Esoteric Buddhism is the Dharmakāya Buddha, that is Mahāvairocana, which means the significance of the universe itself. In Exoteric Buddhism the Dharmakāya Buddha does not preach. On the other hand, in Esoteric Buddhism, the Dharmakāya preaches. The preachings are too mysterious for people to listen to and understand with their ears and brains. To do that people are required to undergo various kinds of training and ceremonies. The understanding of Dharmakāya means the awareness of Dharma working through the vulgar and temporal body. This might be called "enlightenment". The awareness of Dharma is recognized by all Buddhists whether they belong to Exoteric or Esoteric Buddhism. Therefore, the question of the principal images, the devotion to special sutras, or an atheistic attitude to Buddhism are not essential differences among the Buddhist sects.

Incidentally, this religious recognition and deep mystic experiences are not limited to Buddhism only. They often appear beyond the incompatibility of nations, cultures, and religions, and sometimes some special person without any religious training can experience them. That is, they are a universal phenomenon<sup>7)</sup>. Probably William Blake could be one of those special people; the Dharma could have worked through him and made him have mystic visions throughout life. In Blake's works we sometimes come across expressions reminding us of the passages of Avataṃsaka Sutra<sup>8)</sup>. As Kūkai said, similar words might not always mean the same content and experience<sup>9)</sup>. But even if they are not "the same experience", it would be right to say that they are "a similar experience with the same quality".



## 6. CONCLUSION

Blake's highest world is the world of Imagination where God, man and nature are unified in a perfect harmony. We should remember that Imagination is really an immense world beyond our limited egoistic world, although it is connected to it. Blake's mystic experience that man could live with God in this world seems to be common with the teaching of Buddhism. According to the teaching of Buddhism, we start from the denial of all desires and come to the recognition of the awareness of "Selflessness" and at the highest dimension we could finally affirm everything in the world. All desires and passions would be affirmed there. In Blake's works we can see the enigmas and contradictions, such as "the marriage of Heaven and Hell", "the cross falling down to Hell with a snake", etc. Blake's artistic universe also looks confusing, because various kinds of contradictions, such as sorrow and joy, worries and hopes, division and unity, disturbance and quietness exist and make up the complicated and incomprehensible images. People sometimes feel offended by these images and fail to catch his message. They might be perplexed by Blake's anti-Christian concepts, but they are not anti-Christian and often express Blake's religious convictions. This is Blake's Imagination and the teachings of Christ and they are connected with the core of all religions. Naturally, a man's expression is determined by his culture. Blake's mystic experience, which was determined by the eighteenth century Christian world, might not be called "perfect" or "absolute", but was connected with the universal truth of all religions.

## Notes

The quotations of William Blake are from Geoffrey

Keynes ed., *Blake Complete Writings with Variant Readings* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969) and G. E. Bentley, Jr., ed., *William Blake's Writings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), vol.II

- 1) J. G. Davies, *The Theology of William Blake*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), p.110.
- 2) Mark Schorer, *William Blake: The Politics of Vision*, (New York: Random House, 1959), pp.56-57.
- 3) G. E. Bentley ed., *William Blake's Writings*, vol.II, p.1511.
- 4) *op.cit.*
- 5) Eiko ANDO, "The Significance of 'To Tirzah'", (Muroan: Journal of Language and Culture of Hokkaido, No. 6, 2008), pp. 95-103.
- 6) Eiko ANDO, On Blake's *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, (Muroan: Memoirs of The Muroan Institute of Technology, No.58, 2009), pp. 79-87.
- 7) Hideo Kishimoto, *Religious Mysticism*, (Tokyo: Daimeido Press, 1988), p. 27.
- 8) Makoto Sangu, *Select Poems of William Blake*, (Tokyo: Kenkyuusha 1925), p. 258.
- 9) Kūkai, *The Precious Key to the Secret Treasury from All Works of Kūkai* translated by Yūshou Miyasaka (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobou, 1984), vol. II, pp.42-77.

## William Blake の宗教世界

安藤栄子

基督教においては、人間は原罪を受け継ぐ罪人であり、罪故に神とは分離されているのであり、神へ帰るには贖罪者イエス・キリストに従うのみであると言われる。このような厳格な基督教世界に誕生しながら、ブレイクは、神と人間を分離させる原罪の本質は人間の自我であると主張する。罪をそのように見て、それを贖うための神の子の受難と死を必ずしも重視しない彼の考えは基督教とはたしかに一線を画すといえる。

ところで、ブレイクが最高の精神界と考えるのはImaginationという想像力の世界であるが、そこでは神と人間、自然はこのままで完全な調和のうちに融合される。注意すべきは、それは自我をつきぬけた高次元の世界でありながら、この世界を少しもはなれていないものであって、それを言葉で表現しようとするれば、はてしない矛盾となり絵筆で補おうとするれば不可解な謎とならざるを得ない、ということである。故に天国と地獄は結婚し、十字架は蛇と共に地獄に落ち、人間は神であるという異端的な主張も認められるのである。このように此岸において神と共に生きるという神秘体験は、仏教の教義に一脈通ずるところがあると思われる。一切の欲望を否定することから出発し「無我」を自覚した次元において一切を肯定し得るのが仏教の本質であり、それが「さとり」である。このように基督教世界に生きながら、ブレイクの思想は仏教にきわめて近いものを持っていると考えられる。