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READINGS

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ORDINATION AND PRECEPTS IN THE *PLATFORM SŪTRA*

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Monastic life has always occupied a central place in Chinese Buddhism and the forms of Buddhism imported into China from India and Central Asia. For more than two millennia Buddhist traditions have been devoted to interpreting and refining the ceremony of initiation (ordination) into the order of monks and nuns and the sets of rules (precepts) regulating the collective life of monastics. At the same time, the tradition has grappled to find ways of meaningfully involving laypeople in a religion that has traditionally been centered around monasteries and their residents. The *Platform Sūtra* occupies an important position in the perennial debate in Buddhism over how to define the special form of purity especially associated with the vows of monastics but also sought after by laypeople. In spite of its monastic setting, the *Platform Sūtra* is very much a text directed at laypeople, and through the special ordination and precept ritual it contains, it seems to play down or even blur the distinction between lay and monastic.

The very title of the *Platform Sūtra* alludes to the theme of ordination, since the term "platform" (*tan*) probably refers to a raised stage on which ordination could be conducted. The title of the early manuscript version of the *Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch* found at Dunhuang is followed by the explanatory words "including the

bestowal of the formless precepts" (cf. Yampolsky, 125, which has a somewhat different translation). Indeed, an ordination ceremony bestowing these "formless precepts" on the audience is embedded in the text, which includes sections on discerning the three bodies of the Buddha within oneself, reciting the four bodhisattva vows, performing the formless repentance, receiving the formless precepts through the recitation of the three refuges, and an explanation of the teachings of the perfection of wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*) (Yampolsky, 141–46). As I will discuss below, this ordination ceremony is clearly directed toward laypeople as much as, or even more than, monastics. In addition to offering a simplified version of ordination, the *Platform Sūtra* seems to weaken or perhaps collapse the distinction between monk and layman. With its radical attacks on dualistic thinking and the separation of means and end, the text appears to throw into question the traditional basis of monastic life. The first two sections of this chapter offer a focused exploration of the context in which the *Platform Sūtra* was created, including practices related to precepts and ordination, in order to help us gain a better understanding of the text's fundamental claims. Following that, the discussion turns to four areas associated with ordination and precepts in which the *Platform Sūtra* made new or significant contributions.

VINAYA AND PRECEPTS IN CHINESE BUDDHISM

The earliest Chinese Buddhists probably learned about monastic discipline from traveling monks from Central Asia and India. Chinese monks could probably imitate some of the practices they saw these people performing, but the ritual of ordination, the rules governing monasticism, and the complex ceremonies of daily life still required explanation. By the fourth century C.E., Chinese Buddhists had become vitally concerned with the rules or precepts (*jie*) of monastic discipline, a corpus of literature known as *vinaya* in Sanskrit (*lü* in Chinese). The earliest translations concerning monasticism were

simple sets of rules without much explanation, and to many Chinese, the texts seemed incomplete. The eminent monk Dao'an (312–385) made one of the first attempts to codify monastic ceremonies in an influential text (no longer extant). Even while compiling it, he called for a good translation of the full *vinaya*.[1] The terse lists of rules that early Chinese monks had been using probably constituted a liturgical text, used in fortnightly assemblies when monks rapidly recited the precepts. In contrast, a full *vinaya* provided lengthy discussions of each rule, including stories about the circumstances behind its formulation, definitions of the terms used, procedures for implementing the rule, and exceptions to its imposition. It also contained details about the rituals followed by monks. However, the *vinaya* was not an easy text to understand. It was filled with technical terms, frequently transliterated rather than translated (using Chinese characters that otherwise do not make sense to approximate the sound of a Sanskrit term).

The major rules in the *vinayas* of the early Indian schools of Buddhism do not differ very much in the various texts that are extant, indicating that early Indian monastics were hesitant to make changes to the *vinaya*. In one story about the so-called "first council" convened after the Buddha died, a monk suggested that because the Buddha had passed into *nirvāṇa* (literally, "extinction"), the saṅgha did not have to observe all of the rules. Other monks objected, however, and the assembly voted not to change any of the rules because the monks feared being criticized. Early Chinese monks must have felt an overwhelming desire to follow the rules set forth by the Buddha. Two of the most famous Chinese pilgrims who wrote travel accounts of their time abroad, Faxian (337–422) and Yijing (635–713), were primarily concerned with obtaining and translating *vinaya*.

Eventually five full *vinayas* from different Indian Buddhist schools (all considered "Hīnayāna"; Indian Mahāyāna movements never produced their own *vinaya*) were translated into Chinese; the first four were completed during a twenty-six-year period early in the fifth century. As Chinese monks discovered the contents of the *vinaya*,

they must have felt dismayed at times. After all, how could rules formulated in the fourth century B.C.E. in India be suitable for Chinese disciples living more than eight centuries later? During this same period, a number of Mahāyāna scriptures were also translated into Chinese, many of which contained sections concerning the behavior of bodhisattvas, enlightened beings of compassion whose status sometimes blurred the line between layperson and monastic. In addition, following a long tradition in Buddhism, Chinese authors wrote new apocryphal scriptures that they claimed had been preached by the Buddha in India. The result was the emergence of a number of interpretations of ideal monastic and lay behavior.

As Buddhism evolved and moved into new cultural areas, some of the old rules became inappropriate and irrelevant, yet no mechanism was available to change the *vinaya*. Instead, monastic communities gradually came to ignore some rules and to stress others. At times, they adopted practices not found in the canon. For example, one of the hallmarks of Chinese monastic Buddhism, vegetarianism, is not required in the *vinaya* as long as the animal has not been killed specifically for the recipient. Other rules, such as the prohibitions against eating after noon or handling money, were ignored or circumvented by Chinese monastics. Sometimes rules written for specific temples or schools were used to alter monastic behavior, often by modifying rules from the *vinaya*.[2] This was true of the extensive codes written for Chan monasteries, which, although they relied heavily on the *vinaya*, added or changed many rules.[3] Other practices not included in the *vinaya*, such as the physical labor often associated with Chan, were found at many monasteries. Thus, in many ways actual practice diverged significantly from the prescriptions contained in the *vinaya*.

Another way of expanding and reinterpreting precepts is found in various Mahāyāna texts translated into Chinese that contained what are often called "bodhisattva precepts" bearing a superficial resemblance to the precepts of the *vinaya*. For example, the *Perfection of Wisdom (Prajñāpāramitā) Sūtra in 8,000 Lines* lists ten good precepts: 1) not

killing; 2) not stealing; 3) not engaging in improper sexual relations; 4) not lying; 5) not uttering harsh speech; 6) not uttering words causing enmity between people; 7) not engaging in idle speech; 8) not being covetous; 9) not being angry; and 10) not holding wrong views.[4] The first four closely resemble the most important rules for monks found in the *vinaya*, which if broken would result in permanent expulsion from the saṅgha. However, they are much more vague: no indication is given as to whether the precepts are for lay or monastic practitioners, and they may well have been intended for both. The *vinayas* specifically state that sexual intercourse, stealing, taking the life of a human being, and lying about spiritual attainments should result in expulsion from the monastic order (Skt.: *pārājika*); other types of killing, lying, and sexual behavior are handled with lesser penalties. However, most Mahāyāna scriptures provide little explanation of the bodhisattva precepts, many of which concern mental attitudes rather than the physical or verbal actions that are the focus of the *vinaya*. Infringements of bodhisattva precepts presumably result in karmic punishments rather than adjudication by a religious order.

Another idea complicating Buddhist practice was that proper observance of rules was an internal process rather than a social convention. The *Platform Sūtra* suggests that the bodhisattva precepts originate not in a ceremony of conferral but in the innate potentiality of each person to become enlightened (called "buddha nature" because everyone is understood to have the nature of a buddha). The *Platform Sūtra* prefaces its version of a bodhisattva ordination by quoting a line from the *Brahma's Net Sūtra* (*Fanwang jing*), an apocryphal text composed in China that was one of the most popular sources for the bodhisattva precepts in East Asia. The citation, "From the outset your own nature is pure" (Yampolsky, 141), suggests that observing the precepts is a matter of following one's own nature rather than adhering to rules established by a group. According to the *Sūtra on the Original Action of the Necklace of the Bodhisattva*, an apocryphal text closely associated with the *Brahma's Net Sūtra*, the precepts could be

conferred by virtually anyone, including husbands and wives upon each other. Unlike the prohibitions of the *vinaya*, the bodhisattva precepts did not cease upon death but lasted from lifetime to lifetime. One could receive them, but could not discard them. One might violate them, but could never lose them.[5] When bodhisattva precepts were used in this way, they resembled a call to enlightenment more than an initiation into a group of practitioners.

Despite some claims that following the bodhisattva precepts transcended the need to observe traditional rules of the *vinaya*, most monks and nuns in China figured out ways of combining the two systems. After a few centuries of the kind of debate over precepts reflected in the *Platform Sūtra*, a consensus emerged in practice. The bodhisattva precepts were usually combined with rules of the *vinaya* for monks and nuns in a hierarchical system. A person ordaining as a Buddhist monastic might first take refuge (in the "Three Jewels" of Buddha, dharma, and saṅgha), then the five lay precepts,[6] the 10 novice precepts, and the 250 precepts for monks (or 348 for nuns) used in China, before finally receiving the bodhisattva precepts.[7] The *vinaya* precepts were taken only by monastics, but the other parts of this ceremony could all be taken by laypeople (although an abbreviated form of the novice precepts of eight rules were sometimes taken only for a limited time).

DIFFERENT FORMS OF ORDINATION

According to the second edition of the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, the term "ordination" should be restricted to a ritual "publicly designating and setting apart certain persons for special religious service and leadership, granting them religious authority and power to be exercised for the welfare of the community."[8] However, ordination in the Chinese Buddhist tradition could be conferred on either monks and nuns or laypeople. In either case, two closely related homophones were used to refer to the process, "receiving the precepts" or "conferring

the precepts" (both pronounced *shoujie*). To develop the definition provided in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*: when the precepts from the *vinaya* were bestowed on a new monastic, the initiate was granted a special status in the group and exercised power for the benefit of the community. A small minority of monastics went even further and lived as recluses, but even then they were considered to have special status as exemplary members of the saṅgha. When laypeople received the five lay precepts or some of the novice precepts, their status as part of a community was more ambiguous. Traditional texts referred to a four-part order or fourfold saṅgha consisting of monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. Thus, even if lay believers did not belong to an actual order that enforced the precepts, they belonged to a virtual order in which violations of precepts might result in karmic punishments. The bodhisattva precepts functioned in much the same way. For monastics, receipt of the bodhisattva precepts would emphasize their Mahāyāna beliefs in a way not possible by following the *vinaya* precepts alone. For a lay believer, receiving the bodhisattva precepts might be a way of joining a new (nonmonastic) congregation; it functioned this way in some Pure Land groups during the Song dynasty (960–1279).[9] At other times, receiving the bodhisattva precepts might simply be a way of establishing a karmic connection with a respected teacher, or for laypeople to increase their overall store of good karma or merit. Throughout this chapter, I follow Chinese usage in deploying the word "ordination" to refer to all of these cases, but the reader should be alert to different nuances in meaning.

Several models for ordination existed at the time the *Platform Sūtra* was composed. One was the process for ordaining monks and nuns contained in the different *vinaya* codes. In the *vinaya* most frequently used in the eighth century, the ceremony of full ordination was a long ritual that took place in a sanctified area (or, noncanonically, on a raised platform). In attendance were a minimum of ten fully ordained monks plus a *vinaya* master chosen to perform the role of preceptor. In the course of the ceremony robes were conferred, the candidate was questioned concerning his or her qualifications,

reverence was paid to buddhas and monks present, and then a series of injunctions were read, to which the ordinand gave verbal assent.[10]

Other methods of ordination involved bodhisattva precepts, as noted above. The receipt of bodhisattva precepts could be further subdivided into two basic types: conferral by a group and self-ordination. In self-ordinations, the precepts were conferred by buddhas and bodhisattvas as the candidate performed austerities and received a sign from the Buddha. According to the *Brahma's Net Sūtra*:

> If after the Buddha's death, you have a mind to perform good acts and desire to take the bodhisattva precepts, you may confer the precepts upon yourself by taking vows in front of an image of a buddha or bodhisattva. For seven days, you should confess in front of the Buddha [image]; if you see a sign, then you have acquired the precepts. If you do not see a sign, you should [practice] for two weeks, three weeks, or even a year; by that time you should surely receive a sign. After receiving a sign, you acquire the precepts in front of an image of a buddha or bodhisattva. If you have not received a sign, then even if you take the precepts, you have not actually acquired them.
>
> If you acquire the precepts directly from a teacher who has, in turn, [properly] acquired the precepts, then it is not necessary to receive a sign. Why? Because the precepts have already been transmitted through a succession of teachers, a sign is not necessary. . . .
>
> If no teacher capable of granting the precepts can be found within one thousand *li*, you should go before an image of the Buddha or bodhisattva to acquire the precepts. You must receive a sign [from the Buddha in this case].[11]

Self-ordination was clearly an impressive way to receive the precepts because they came directly from the buddhas and bodhisattvas, were accompanied by a special sign from the Buddha that they had been conferred, and frequently involved considerable

practice by the recipient. At the same time, such ordinations could weaken the institutional structure of a group. If the precepts were conferred by the buddhas and bodhisattvas, then who would oversee adherence to them? Who could impose penalties? Who could ensure that people receiving them were sincere? Could anyone argue with a practitioner who claimed that he had received instructions to alter the precepts? Issues such as these led most groups to prefer ordinations that involved institutions and lineages of practitioners. However, the allure of self-ordinations could not be easily overcome. Perhaps for reasons like these, the *Necklace Sūtra* listed three types of ordination in descending order, maintaining the primacy of ordinations by groups over self-ordinations: 1) ordinations by the physically present Buddha; 2) ordinations by bodhisattva practitioners who were within a reasonable distance; 3) going before an image of a buddha and receiving the precepts.[12] The bodhisattva ordinations used by some monks and laypeople could be very detailed. The influential ordination manual composed by the Tiantai patriarch Zhanran (711–782) contained twelve separate sections, each involving a number of steps:

1. introduction
2. three refuges (placing faith in the Buddha, his teaching, order of monastics)
3. invitation to Śākyamuni as preceptor, Mañjuśrī as master of ceremonies, Maitreya as teacher, buddhas of the ten directions as witnesses, and various bodhisattvas as fellow students
4. confession
5. aspiration to supreme enlightenment (four bodhisattva vows)
6. questioning about hindrances to being ordained
7. conferral of the precepts through the three collections of pure precepts
8. ascertaining those who have witnessed the ceremony
9. sign from the Buddha confirming the validity of the ceremony
10. explanation of the precepts (ten major precepts of the *Brahma's Net Sūtra*)

11. exhortation to observe the precepts
12. dedication of the merit from the ceremony to all sentient beings[13]

This ordination was composed of elements from a variety of sources, including traditional *vinaya* ordinations, self-ordinations, and bodhisattva ordinations granted by religious orders. The precepts conferred were from the *Brahma's Net Sūtra*, the set of bodhisattva precepts most commonly used in China.

THE SIMPLICITY OF ORDINATION

The image of ordination in the *Platform Sūtra* is considerably shorter and less complex than ordinations prescribed in the *vinaya* and in the Tiantai ritual noted above. It is also simpler than many of the ordination rituals described in other early Chan documents.

The *Platform Sūtra* ceremony is very brief, consisting of five parts (Yampolsky, 141–46):

1. perceiving the three bodies of the Buddha in oneself
2. recitation of the four bodhisattva vows
3. formless confession
4. receiving the precepts in the three refuges
5. a sermon explaining the perfection of wisdom

The precepts are conferred at the very beginning of the ceremony, when the recipient is urged to "receive the precepts of formlessness" by taking refuge in the three bodies of the Buddha that dwell within his own body. The candidate begins the recitation by stating, "I take refuge in the pure *dharmakāya* Buddha in my own body" (Yampolsky, 141). In some respects this step seems to be an abbreviated way of taking refuge in the Three Jewels, since the Buddha is always mentioned first, before the second and third jewels. This interpretation is complicated by the fact that later in the ceremony the candidate

takes refuge explicitly in the Three Jewels. Some scholars of the *Platform Sūtra* have tried to resolve this conundrum by suggesting that the first mention of the buddhas within oneself is a substitution for calling on an assembly of buddhas to serve as the recipient's order. The recipient learns that he does not join an external order but rather realizes his own nature, that is, the buddha within him.[14]

The first three elements are simply recited three times each, according to formulae included in the *Platform Sūtra*. Such a ceremony would have been appropriate for a large group like the thousands of lay and monastic believers described at the beginning of the text. However, the same ritual elements could be prolonged and easily turned into a ceremony lasting for weeks. Zongmi (780–841), a patriarch in both the Huayan lineage and the Chan lineage of Huineng's promoter Shenhui (684–758), describes a similar ritual in which the confession can go on for several weeks.[15] A number of sections in the Tiantai ceremony described above are not found in the *Platform Sūtra*, including invitations to Buddha to attend the event, questions to determine whether the candidates for ordination are eligible to receive the precepts, a sign from the buddhas that the ceremony is valid, and explanations of specific precepts. In this sense, the *Platform Sūtra* ordination differs significantly from ceremonies inducting monks into a specific order of religious practitioners, resembling more the kind of self-ordination described in the *Brahmā's Net Sūtra*. However, the ceremony is simpler than a typical self-ordination ceremony; for example, the confession consists of a formula repeated three times rather than a long period of retreat and meditation, and no sign from the Buddha—such as a dream, vision, or feeling of being touched on the head—is required to validate the ordination. Moreover, even though the buddhas mentioned are found within the candidate, nevertheless it is Huineng who confers the precepts.

Other early Chan texts also include descriptions of precepts and ordination rituals. Compared to these, the *Platform Sūtra* appears unconcerned about monastic ordination and less interested in other ordination traditions. For example, a document discovered at Dunhuang attributed to Shenhui entitled *Platform Sermon* (*Tanyu*) seems to be addressed largely to monks, although laypeople also appear to have been included. The text consists of only five parts:

1. four bodhisattva vows (aspiration to enlightenment)
2. obeisance to the Buddhas (three refuges)
3. sincere repentance (confession)
4. exhortation to maintain the precepts
5. sermon on the perfection of wisdom[16]

During the confession, specific sets of precepts are mentioned: the four offenses listed in the *vinaya* that require permanent expulsion of monastics from the Buddhist order (see above), five heinous sins (killing one's father, mother, or an *arhat*; shedding the blood of a buddha; splitting the order), seven heinous sins (the previous five plus killing one's preceptor or teacher), violating the ten good precepts, and any major acts that would block progress on the path. The section on encouragement uses the word *zhaijie* (literally "precepts of purity"), referring to the eight precepts maintained by pious lay believers when they temporarily follow a quasi-monastic lifestyle, perhaps indicating that Shenhui was partly addressing a lay audience. More weighty, however, is the mention of the four offenses requiring expulsion, which shows that the ceremony was intended for monastics as well.

Another ordination ceremony is found in a text produced by the school of Shenxiu (?606–706), Huineng's rival in the *Platform Sūtra*, entitled *The Expedient Means of Realizing Birthlessness in Mahāyāna* (*Dasheng wusheng fangbian men*). This text emphasizes ordination into a group and institutional affiliation, and the ceremony it describes is somewhat more elaborate than that contained in the *Platform Sūtra*. It consists of eight parts:

1. recitation of four bodhisattva vows
2. a request that the Buddhas be preceptors and witnesses

3. three refuges
4. questions about the five capabilities
5. recitation of one's name and performance of repentance
6. encouragement to hold the precepts of the mind
7. meditation
8. a ritualized sermon on the perfection of wisdom[17]

In the first place, in this text, an order or organized group of buddhas and bodhisattvas is mentioned. In addition, the five capabilities described in the fourth section hark back to the treatment of precepts in *vinaya* sources and the literature on bodhisattva precepts, quite distinct from the formless precepts of the *Platform Sūtra*. The five abilities are discussed as follows: "(1) Can you reject all bad associates from now until the time of your enlightenment? (2) Can you become close to spiritual compatriots? (3) Can you maintain the precepts without transgression even in the face of death? (4) Can you read the Mahāyāna scriptures and inquire of their profound meaning? (5) Can you strive to the extent of your own power to save sentient beings?"[18] The five capabilities indicate that recipients were expected to follow the precepts. Shenxiu, the reputed author of the text, had spent time at Yuquansi, a temple noted for its inclusion of precepts, Tiantai traditions, and Chan practices.[19]

The ceremonies described in the *Platform Sūtra* and the two other early Chan texts have much in common. They all include a central portion involving recitation of or exhortations about the precepts. They also consistently preface this with the recitation of vows and the performance of confession, and they follow the precepts with a sermon on the stock topic of the perfection of wisdom. The simplicity of some of these ceremonies, especially the one found in the *Platform Sūtra*, suggests that they may have been intended more as an inclusive ritual creating some sort of karmic tie between a teacher and lay or monastic believers than as a ceremony that admitted people to a specific type of religious organization. Note the opening sentence of the Dunhuang version of the *Platform Sūtra*: "The Master

Huineng . . . transmitted the precepts of formlessness. At that time over ten-thousand monks, nuns, and lay followers sat before him" (Yampolsky, 125). Although hyperbolic, the description may also reflect the excitement that accompanied Shenhui's very successful sale of ordination certificates to finance resistance to the An Lushan rebellion (discussed in John Jorgensen's chapter in this volume) and the subsequent rebuilding of the capitals of the Tang empire. Evidence concerning the use of the *Platform Sūtra* ceremony during the Tang has not survived. In any event, the *Platform Sūtra* clearly propagated a relatively simplified ordination ceremony intended to be used broadly.

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN MONK AND LAYMAN

The *Platform Sūtra* presents a complicated picture of the differences between monastic and lay practitioners. Later sources in the Chan tradition have, in turn, offered different interpretations of the distinction.

The opening words of the *Platform Sūtra* indicate that the audience for both the sūtra and the ordination ritual includes both lay and monastic followers (Yampolsky, 175). Able lay believers had long been honored in the Chinese Buddhist tradition. Note the lay preacher Vimalakīrti, the protagonist of a scripture that bears his name, who bests all of the monks and bodhisattvas in debate. Depicted frequently in early Chinese art, his example was an inspiration to lay believers, and, as Peter Gregory's chapter in this book shows, the text bearing his name is cited several times in the *Platform Sūtra*.[20] The biography of Huineng included at the beginning of the *Platform Sūtra* is remarkable because it describes the Sixth Patriarch at the time of his enlightenment as a layman who had received no monastic training. In fact, the Dunhuang version of the text does not even mention Huineng's ordination. Even more striking is the fact that Huineng receives Hongren's transmission and Bodhidharma's robe

even though he is still a layman. Furthermore, the poetry contest, the central story of the *Platform Sūtra*, stresses Huineng's illiteracy, whereas most monks seem to have been literate, based on the fact that Tang-dynasty governmental regulations for ordination generally required candidates to be able to recite large numbers of scriptures.[21] In fact, there are many indications that high-profile monastics, such as Shenxiu or Shenhui, came from families of the educated elite and had been extensively educated when young.

However, despite the emphasis on lay practice and the claim in the *Platform Sūtra* that Huineng was himself a layman when he received the transmission, other Chan sources emphasize that he did eventually become a monk. Some documents state that he was ordained in 676, when he was either thirty-three or thirty-nine years old. A biography of Huineng that existed by the early ninth century lists all of the monks who participated in his ordination, a degree of detail rarely included in other biographies.[22] In contrast to the Dunhuang version of the *Platform Sūtra*, the Yuan-dynasty version records the ordination.[23] Even the Dunhuang version implicitly recognizes Huineng as a monk by calling him "great master" (*dashi*), a term not used for laypeople. Finally, a later inscription (probably dating from the seventeenth century) claims to mark the site where Huineng's hair—regarded as a holy relic of his premonastic body—was installed after his ordination.[24]

What are we to make of the discrepancy in which texts ignore or stress Huineng's ordination? The imperial government throughout the Tang dynasty displayed a variety of attitudes toward the importance of the precepts and ordinations. Sometimes the state tried to control Buddhism by regulating ordinations; at other times it did not seem to care, or was unable to do so. The extravagant support of Buddhism by rulers such as Empress Wu (624–705, r. 690–705) may have resulted in lax discipline at monasteries, and later government suspicion of monastics (there were no ordinations for several decades following 711).[25] Monasticism was further weakened during the An Lushan rebellion (755–763). The unrestricted sale of ordination certificates (at which Shenhui so famously excelled) meant that anyone, no matter what their qualifications, could acquire the status of a monastic. Many saw this as a simple tax shelter and the whole notion of monkhood was undermined. Furthermore, governmental crackdowns must have forced some devout people to circumvent official ordinations altogether. Documents from Dunhuang reveal that many monks and nuns lived outside of monasteries, frequently with family members.[26] Some scholars have suggested that, given its emphasis on formless precepts, the Dunhuang version of the *Platform Sutra* may have been compiled by monks who were reacting against governmental controls on ordinations.[27] Note the following statement that emphasizes the spirit of practice over outward displays of piety: "If you wish to practice, it is all right to do so as laymen; you don't have to be in a temple. If you are in a temple but do not practice, you are like the evil-minded people of the west [i.e., India, or Amitābha's pure land]" (Yampolsky, 159).

A loosening of the distinction between monastic and lay status is also apparent in other early Chan sources. According to a passage in the *Record of the Dharma Jewel Through the Generations* (*Lidai fabao ji*), Shenhui would lecture every month from an ordination platform to press his arguments about the superiority of his teaching over that of the so-called Northern School of Chan.[28] The format of these lectures is not completely clear, but since they were delivered from an ordination platform, they probably included an ordination ceremony, perhaps like that in the *Platform Sūtra*. We can note too the placement of the ordinations at the beginning of the three Chan texts on ordination discussed above (Shenhui's *Platform Sermon*, *The Expedient Means of Realizing Birthlessness* of Shenxiu's school, and the *Platform Sūtra*). This arrangement suggests that the ordinations may have been used to open meetings that included both lay and monastic practitioners. After conferring the precepts, the lecturer delivered his sermon.

The portrayal of Huineng in the *Platform Sūtra* suggests that his role was not limited to master of ceremonies and lecturer. Huineng himself seems to serve as the Buddha conferring the precepts; hence

the text is referred to as a "sūtra." The Buddha is also summoned from within the recipient himself; note how the three bodies of the Buddha are said to be found within the candidate for ordination (Yampolsky, 141–43). The *Platform Sūtra* states that, in later generations, when Huineng is not present, the text is to be transmitted: "If others are able to encounter the *Platform Sūtra* it will be as if they received the teaching personally from me" (Yampolsky, 173). In a sense, the Buddha is still sanctioning the transmission, but through his words in the sūtra rather than by handing down a robe or begging bowl. The authors of the *Platform Sūtra* must have modeled its precept ceremony on a format that probably served as a means to rapidly produce karmic connections with large numbers of people and to collect large sums of money. Such a format might have been used to sell ordination certificates, but in many cases it might simply have been a ceremony to indicate that a person formally took someone as a teacher.[29] Such evidence points to a loose distinction between lay and monastic behavior, a tendency to which the growing practice of bodhisattva ordinations might have contributed.

In other respects, however, early Chan was very much concerned with monastic purity. Many monks associated with the early Chan tradition carefully followed the precepts, in some cases adopting practices more ascetic than those of other monks. Sources that emphasize Huineng's ordination return the monk to a more orthodox position than that found in the Dunhuang version of the *Platform Sūtra*.[30] As critical interpreters of the Chan tradition, we need to remember that the seemingly antinomian rejection of monasticism and meditation by some later Chan groups, particularly by such figures as Mazu Daoyi (706–786) and the Hongzhou School, cannot be taken at face value. The same holds true for the Chan backlash against antinomianism: the claims made by Zongmi about meditation and monastic practices of various Chan groups of his time should not necessarily be taken as accurate.[31] Instead, all such positions can also be seen as criticism of those who would cling to practices in superficial ways that impede spiritual progress. Some of these statements probably refer to the position that a pure mind underlies both purity and defilement and that clinging to either obscures the pure mind.[32]

We have thus uncovered a variety of attitudes from Tang-dynasty and later sources about the distinction between monk and layman in the *Platform Sūtra*. For some, the conferral of precepts may have been a fund-raising device, asking people to make a donation and participate in a ceremony. Or it could have been a way to create a karmic connection with a Buddhist teacher, or simply an attempt to improve one's karma and attract good luck. As the Yuan-dynasty version of the text states: "In coming from afar and gathering together here, you all share in [the same karmic] connection."[33] There is little evidence to support the viewpoint that the *Platform Sūtra* valorizes formal initiation into the monkhood following the traditional ceremony. However, one intriguing piece of evidence has been noted. According to the *Platform Sūtra*, the text itself should be used in a process of transmission that is not unlike ordination. The text states, "Unless a person has received the *Platform Sūtra*, he has not received the sanction. The place, date, and the name of the recipient must be made known, and these are attached to it when it is transmitted" (Yampolsky, 162).[34] A similar understanding of the use of the text as an ordination document comes from ninth-century Japan. The pilgrim Ennin (794–864) wrote a record of his travels in China and a bibliography of the works he brought back. The *Platform Sūtra* is listed with other texts concerning precepts and ordinations. This classification suggests that Ennin might have viewed the text as functioning like precept manuals or ordination documents.[35]

THE CONNECTION AMONG PRECEPTS, MEDITATION, AND WISDOM

Early Indian Buddhism often utilized the tripartite structure of precepts or morality (Skt.: *śīla*), meditation (Skt.: *dhyāna*) or meditative concentration (Skt.: *samādhi*), and wisdom (Skt.: *prajñā*) to chart the

path to liberation. Sometimes this conception of practice was sequential. Performing good deeds, avoiding evil, and following precepts were placed first. The cultivation of pure states of mind and the practice of meditation came second. These were followed by the final stage, the achieving of enlightened wisdom. In many texts the three categories do not follow any particular order but are viewed as equally essential for achieving salvation.

The philosophy of the *Platform Sūtra* takes these three categories seriously while criticizing any absolute distinction among them. Buddhist thought has always cast a suspicious eye on the positing of any transcendent goal, such as a final extinction that seems utterly different from or transcendent of the methods used to attain it. This conceptual sensitivity to the relationship between goal and path (the third and fourth, respectively, of the famous Four Noble Truths) also makes sense in psychological terms, since any ultimate goal seems bound to encourage clinging or desire.

The *Platform Sūtra* adopts a number of strategies for talking about these basic categories of Buddhist practice. One approach, in keeping with other early Chan material, is to question the typical order that places observance of the precepts on an elementary level and achievement of enlightenment or buddhahood on a more advanced level. The formless precepts described in the *Platform Sūtra* are similar to "precepts that arise with or accompany meditation (*dinggongjie*)." This concept was based on the view that a person in deep meditative concentration associated with the form realm would not violate any of the precepts associated with the desire realm. However, when the practitioner emerged from the concentration, he might then violate the precepts. A person who had realized *nirvāṇa* in this life would naturally and permanently follow the precepts (*daogongjie*).[36] Thus the Buddha embodied all of the precepts before he enunciated them in response to various problems that arose in the order. This concept was further developed in later works and was adopted by Chan thinkers, who gave it their own particular twist.

The *Platform Sūtra* seems to call into question the sequential understanding of precepts, meditation, and wisdom. The early Northern Chan text on the *The Expedient Means of Realizing Birthlessness*, discussed above, first takes practitioners through the conferral of "the precepts of the mind" (*xinjie*) and ends with the practice of meditation and a sermon on the perfection of wisdom.[37] By contrast, an important section of the *Platform Sūtra* emphasizes the identity of meditative concentration (otherwise seen as merely preparatory) and wisdom (otherwise considered a final goal). The Sixth Patriarch states directly, "Students, be careful not to say that meditation [or meditative concentration] gives rise to wisdom, or that wisdom gives rise to meditation, or that meditation and wisdom are different from each other. To hold this view implies that things have duality" (Yampolsky, 135). Presumably the same analysis can be extended to the pair of terms "precepts" and "meditation."

In a later section of the *Platform Sūtra*, the Sixth Patriarch advances a straightforward negation of the conventional or gradualist understanding of these three entities as sequential steps. Here, Huineng questions a disciple of Shenxiu (who was sent as a spy) concerning the concepts of precepts, meditation, and wisdom. The disciple replies that his teacher "explains them in this way: Not to commit the various evils is the precepts; to practice all the many good things is wisdom; to purify one's mind is meditation" (Yampolsky, 164). In response to this basic Buddhist explanation of the three forms of practice, Huineng counters that he differs, in that he does not set up or establish the three terms of the equation. He justifies his avoidance of these errors by referring to original purity, self-awakening, and sudden enlightenment. Huineng states: "Self-nature is without error, disturbance, and ignorance. Every thought puts forward the radiance of *prajñā* wisdom, and when one is always separated from the form of things, what is there that can be set up? Self-awakening to self-nature, and sudden practice with sudden awakening—there is nothing gradual in them, so that nothing at all is set up" (Yampolsky, 165). Here the Sixth Patriarch suggests that viewing the Buddhist path as a series of steps, moving from precepts to meditation to wisdom, is a form of gradualism. The proper understanding of the path is to collapse beginning and end into one instant of

simultaneity. Since enlightenment or complete wisdom already inheres in one's original nature, an external, not-yet-achieved goal cannot be postulated.

THE FORMLESS PRECEPTS

The term *wuxiang* literally means "without marks" or lacking any determinate characteristics. Applied to the precepts, the word refers to rules or prohibitions whose content is not specified. Thus in the *Platform Sūtra* the precepts that accompany ordination are formless in the sense that the practitioner naturally comes to follow them without focusing on their specifics. Rarely found in other Buddhist texts, the term "formless precepts" is included in the title of the Dunhuang version of the *Platform Sūtra* and again at the beginning of the ordination ceremony (Yampolsky, 125, 141). Although the words were dropped from the title of later versions of the text, they are still usually found in the ceremony itself.[38]

The idea of formless precepts is complex. Central to the *Platform Sūtra*, it also bears affinities to other basic ideas of Mahāyāna Buddhism, especially the *prajñāpāramitā* notion of the nonsubstantiality of good and evil. According to the Chinese translation of the *Perfection of Wisdom in 25,000 Lines*, "The bodhisattva should fulfill the perfection of wisdom by basing himself on the non-existence of sin and good action."[39] A similar logic appears in the *Platform Sūtra*'s discussion of the formless precepts, explaining the indwelling dharma body. The basic idea is that one's own original nature transcends the distinction between good and evil, purity and impurity. By cleaving to one's original endowment (buddha nature) and not attaching oneself to forms labeled "good" or "evil," one can maintain the highest—that is, nondual—form of purity. Thus, the Sixth Patriarch explains, "If people think of all the evil things, then they will practice evil; if they think of all the good things, then they will practice good. Thus it is clear that in this way all the dharmas are within your own natures, yet your own natures are always pure" (Yampolsky, 141–42). At the same time—at the end of the same paragraph—the text summarizes the practice of receiving the formless precepts using words drawn from conventional morality: "Taking refuge in oneself is to cast aside all actions that are not good; this is known as taking refuge" (Yampolsky, 142).

Other early Chan teachings take a similar approach to nonclinging. Bernard Faure has investigated the related term "nonintentional precepts" (*wuzuo jie*). Faure quotes Shenhui: "We call morality the fact of not arousing the false mind, concentration the absence of such a mind, and wisdom the realization that the mind cannot lie."[40] In a similar fashion, the *Platform Sūtra* associates observance of the precepts with such concepts as "no-thought" (Yampolsky, 138–39, 153).

In the *Platform Sūtra*, the sermon on the perfection of wisdom at the end of the ceremony is superficially similar to the explanation of the precepts found in other ceremonies, a procedure performed so that the newly ordained person does not unwittingly violate major precepts. However, the explanation in the *Platform Sūtra* is unlike that found in most other manuals insofar as it stresses the nonsubstantiality of good and bad rather than the actual rules. The bestowal of formless precepts is also akin to a confession ceremony, a key part of both bodhisattva precept ordinations and meditation rites in the Tiantai school. When a person confessed specific or general wrongdoing, it was called "repentance of phenomena." In the Tiantai tradition, confession ceremonies would begin in this fashion, but then progress to "repentance in principle," a meditative exercise on the nonsubstantiality of all phenomena, including moral and immoral actions. No specific acts were confessed at that point. In a similar fashion, formless precepts were based on nonsubstantiality and had no specific content, yet were thought to be the basis of all precepts.[41]

The concept of formless precepts presented a challenge to Chan practitioners. The formless precepts could be interpreted as requiring considerable attention and a high degree of proficiency in practice. When the confession in principle mentioned above was conducted, only advanced practitioners were allowed to contemplate

the nonsubstantiality of moral categories; it was a dangerous practice for beginning practitioners because it might lead to an antinomian position in which all moral valences were ignored. But in the *Platform Sūtra*, the ordination ritual, rather than marking an early stage in the individual's practice, requires the initiate to master nonsubstantiality, something normally attained only by advanced practitioners. Some modern scholars have suggested that what sets the *Platform Sūtra* apart from earlier texts is precisely that its ordination confers an advanced transmission of Buddhist teachings on beginners.[42] In this way ordination comes to resemble dharma transmission.[43] Zongmi offers one way of understanding this. He suggests that sudden enlightenment provides a glimpse that then has to be cultivated if the practitioner is to maintain enlightenment.[44] Thus, conflating ordination and dharma transmission makes sense if the recipient realizes that this is the beginning of practice, a brief moment of insight that will lead to a more stable form of realization.

Because the formless precepts were not set rules, they also would have been attractive to people who simply wished to be ordained to improve their karma or because it required little commitment to practice while giving them a karmic tie with a teacher. In fact, historical records contain criticisms of such people around the time of Shenhui, though we do not know whether they received the formless precepts.[45]

Ordination in the *Platform Sūtra* is difficult to place in a historical and social context that would enable us to comprehend better what the ceremony might have meant to people around the time the Dunhuang version was compiled. Comparing it with other ordination ceremonies reveals several aspects of the *Platform Sūtra* ceremony. First, it is very simple; it does not refer to any order of practitioner and the original sense of ordination as signifying entry into a group is not apparent. Instead, a ceremony that has its roots in initiation

into a group has been revised to call forth the participants' buddha nature, or perhaps their aspiration to enlightenment, with little or no attention to the stages of religious life following ordination. The ceremony was probably performed on a platform in front of large numbers of people in a short period of time. No long periods of confession were required.

Second, the ceremony makes no distinction between lay and monastic recipients. When the historical background of the text is considered along with the presentation of the biography of Huineng, questions arise about the relative value of lay and monastic practice, but more research needs to be done on this issue. If the protagonist of the *Platform Sūtra* was a layman when he received the Chan transmission, what did this signify? The formless precepts could be interpreted in ways that fit both lay and monastic practitioners, a flexibility that may have increased the attraction of the ordination.

Third, one of the most significant innovations of the *Platform Sūtra* is the conferral of the formless precepts, a realization probably more suited to advanced practitioners, on beginners. The distinction between a ceremony inducting one into a group of practitioners and a ceremony indicating that one had mastered certain teachings was thus blurred, much as the distinction among the precepts, meditation, and wisdom was collapsed in the *Platform Sūtra*. When Shenhui's teachings were later interpreted by Zongmi, the *Platform Sūtra* ordination might be seen as leading to an initial sudden experience of enlightenment in the nonsubstantiality of good and evil, an insight that would have to be deepened through subsequent practice. Just as the hierarchy of morality, meditation, and wisdom was collapsed, so was the distinction between beginning and advanced practices blurred.

NOTES

1. Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China: An Annotated Translation and Study of the "Chanyuan Qinggui,"* Kuroda Institute, Classics of East Asian Buddhism (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 8–16.

2. Mario Poceski, "Xuefeng's Code and the Chan School's Participation in the Development of Monastic Regulations," *Asia Major*, third series, 16, no. 2 (2003): 34–35.
3. Yifa, *Origins*, 53–54.
4. The important role of the ten good precepts in early Mahāyāna is discussed in Shizuka Sasaki, "A Study on the Origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism," *Eastern Buddhist* 30, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 94–95.
5. *Pusa yingluo benye jing*, trans. attributed to Buddhasmṛti (Zhu Fonian, ca. 365), *T* no.1485, 24:1021b.
6. Thought to have been instituted by the Buddha, the five lay precepts are used widely in the Buddhist world. They consist of vows not to engage in killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, or taking intoxicants.
7. For a detailed description of this series of ordinations in the twentieth century, see Holmes Welch, *The Practice of Chinese Buddhism 1900–1950* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 285–96. For lay bodhisattva ordinations, see 84, 294.
8. *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2005), 6851.
9. See Daniel A. Getz, "Popular Religion and Pure Land in Song Dynasty Tiantai Bodhisattva Precept Ordination Ceremonies," in *Going Forth: Visions of Buddhist Vinaya, Essays Presented in Honor of Professor Stanley Weinstein*, ed. William M. Bodiford (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 161–84.
10. For ordination following the *Dharmagupta vinaya* and the directions of an influential seventh-century *vinaya* master, see Ann Hiermann, "Some Remarks on the Rise of the Bhikṣunisaṃgha and on the Ordination Ceremony for Bhikṣunis According to the Dharmaguptakavinaya," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 20, no. 2 (1997): 33–85; and Huaiyu Chen, *The Revival of Buddhist Monasticism in Medieval China* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 93–131.
11. *Fanwangjing*, trans. attributed to Kumārajīva (Jiumoluoshi, 344–409 or 413), *T* no. 1484, 24:1006c.
12. *Pusa yingluo benye jing*, *T* 24:1020c.
13. *Shou pusajie yi*, Zhanran (711–782), Z 59:354b–57a). For an investigation of later Tiantai ordination manuals and how they were used to appeal to lay believers, see Getz, "Popular Religion and Pure Land in Song Dynasty Tiantai Bodhisattva Precept Ordination Ceremonies."
14. Yanagida Seizan, "Daijōkaikyō to shite no Rokuso dangyō," *Indogaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 12, no. 1 (1964): 67.
15. Wendi L. Adamek, *The Mystique of Transmission: On an Early Chan History and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 202–203.
16. Walter Liebenthal, "The Sermon of Shen-hui," *Asia Major*, new series, 3, no. 2 (1953): 139–41.
17. *Dasheng wusheng fangbian men*, *T* no. 2834; the text is also known as *Wu fangbian* (*The Five Expedient Means*). See the translation in John McRae, *The Northern School and the Formation of Early Ch'an Buddhism*, Kuroda Institute, Studies in East Asian Buddhism, 3 (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1987), 171–74; and discussion of the text, 149. See also Adamek, *Mystique of Transmission*, 199; and Bernard Faure, *The Will to Orthodoxy: A Critical Genealogy of Northern Chan Buddhism*, trans. Phyllis Brooks (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 106–18.
18. McRae, *The Northern School*, 172–73 (with slight changes in format).
19. Mario Poceski, "Lay Models of Engagement with Chan Teachings and Practices Among the Literati in Mid-Tang China," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 35 (2007): 66.
20. See also Poceski, "Lay Models," 91. For an English translation of the sūtra, see Burton Watson, *The Vimalakirti Sutra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).
21. McRae, *The Platform Sūtra*, 22, 54, 72.
22. John Jorgensen, *Inventing Hui-neng, the Sixth Patriarch: Hagiography and Biography in Early Ch'an*, Sinica Leidensia, 68 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 688–89.
23. McRae, *The Platform Sūtra*, 3, 92, 96, 99.
24. Jorgensen, *Inventing Hui-neng*, 720–21; Furuta Shōkin and Tanaka Ryōshō, *Enō* (Tokyo: Daizō shuppansha, 1982), 127–34; Yanagida Seizan, *Zenshū shisho no kenkyū* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1967), 525–28. The pagoda said to contain Huineng's hair can still be seen at the Guangxiao temple in Guangzhou.
25. Jorgensen, *Inventing Hui-neng*, 162.
26. Hao Chunwen, *Tanghouqi Wudai Songchu Dunhuang sengni de shehui shenghuo* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 1998).
27. Jorgensen, *Inventing Hui-neng*, 162–64.
28. Adamek, *Mystique of Transmission*, 340; John McRae, "Shen-hui and the Teaching of Sudden Enlightenment," in *Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought*, ed. Peter N. Gregory, Kuroda Institute, Studies in East Asian Buddhism, 5 (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1987), 236.
29. McRae, "Shenhui," 254.
30. Jorgensen, *Inventing Hui-neng*, 163.
31. For Zongmi's critique of Chan at his time, see Peter N. Gregory, *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 224–52.
32. Poceski, "Lay Models." However, much of Poceski's argument rests on a few examples; as he notes, it needs to be expanded to be convincing. A thoughtful discussion of the context of Mazu's critique of monasticism and Zongmi's response can be found in Jinhua Jia, *The Hongzhou School of Buddhism in Eighth- Through Tenth-Century China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 67–72.
33. McRae, *The Platform Sūtra*, 46.
34. See also McRae, *The Platform Sūtra*, 86; and for a further exploration of this issue, the chapter by Wendi Adamek in this volume.
35. T. H. Barrett, "Buddhist Precepts in a Lawless World: Some Comments on the Linhuai Ordination Scandal," in *Going Forth*, 116–17.
36. Yanagida, "Daijōkaikyō," 66, 68 (note 20).
37. Faure, *Will to Orthodoxy*, 111–12.

38. *Enō kenkyū*, ed. Komazawa daigaku zenshūshi kenkyūkai (Tokyo: Daishukan shoten, 1978) 268; McRae, *The Platform Sūtra*, 17.
39. Cited in Étienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism: From the Origins to the Śaka Era*, trans. Sara Webb-Boin, Publications de l'Institut Orientaliste de Louvain, 36 (Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut Orientaliste, Université de Louvain, 1988), 82.
40. Faure, *The Will to Orthodoxy*, 114.
41. See the statements in the "Encomium" of the Yuan version of the *Platform Sūtra*, McRae, 10 and 12. For a discussion of the nonsubstantiality of good and evil, see Neal Donner, "Chih-i's Meditation on Evil," in *Buddhist and Taoist Practice in Medieval Chinese Society*, ed. David W. Chappell (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1987), 49–64.
42. Ishii Kōsei, "Musōkai no genryū," *Komazawa daigaku zen kenkyūjo nenpō* 8 (1997): 132–33.
43. Zongmi notes that in one school of early Chan there was a kind of dharma transmission ritual that resembled the ritual for full ordination; see Adamek, *Mystique of Transmission*, 202–203.
44. Gregory, *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism*, 196–205.
45. Jacques Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society*, trans. Franciscus Verellen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 56–62.

7

THE *PLATFORM SŪTRA* AND CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

BROOK ZIPORYN

The Chan movement is sometimes considered one of several attempts to "sinify" Buddhism, making it more accessible and palatable to Chinese audiences. *The Platform Sūtra* may be understood as a watershed in this process. This view is supported not only by the doctrinal ideas put forward in the text, to be discussed at length below, but even by its title and literary form.[1] The first thing that strikes us when we open this text is the vivid depiction of Huineng, the central figure, as an illiterate rustic possessed of an unschooled natural wisdom, confounding the more sophisticated book learning of socially respected figures. Huineng's unrefined hinterland image echoes a long line of valorized fishermen, woodcutters, and mysterious hermits in Daoist and Confucian texts. The earlier Chan movement, unlike some other schools of Buddhism, had already begun to avoid the complex terminology, lists, and categories of scholastic Indian Buddhism, deploying creative, metaphorizing redefinitions of inherited terms and recombining them in novel ways. The *Platform Sūtra* continues this but brings it to a new level, presenting ideas in a more everyday language marked by supposedly impromptu dialogues and compressed formulations heavy with wit, brevity, and poetic paradox, requiring little prior familiarity with technical vocabulary or elaborate exegesis. And then of course there