

Religious Statistics

Everyone concerned with religions in Japan seems to want statistics. Therefore, **Contemporary Religions in Japan** will periodically publish such accurate information in this field as is available. However, a word of caution is in order. There are certain areas in which religious statistics are reasonably reliable; in others, they have only a relative reliability. For example, statistics regarding the number of denominations, local organizations (shrine, temples, churches etc.), installations, and personnel (clergy) should be reasonably accurate; while statistics regarding the attendance at meetings, or the number of adherents, should be used with great discrimination.

Everyone seems to want to know about the number of adherents, but there is probably no area in which statistical information is quite so unreliable and of so little comparative value. In the first place, there is no religious census in Japan and the only way to estimate the number of believers of any religion is by the dubious process of sam-

pling the population. In the second place, most religious bodies do not have a membership system, so that it is impossible to arrive at more than an approximation of the number of adherents of even any local shrine or temple.

On the one hand, irrespective of the faith of the individuals concerned, to estimate the total number of their adherents temples usually multiply the number of families on their lists by four or five and then add the number of any persons that may be individually affiliated. This method is also used by many Shinto sects. Shrines, on the other hand, usually consider all the residents of their "parishes" as "belonging" to them or, if they have no "parish," they estimate their worshippers by the number of amulets distributed annually. Consequently, since many parishes overlap and many people customarily receive amulets from more than one shrine, the value of the total is of highly questionable.

Even among organizations that have a membership system, Chris-

tian churches, for example, the method of computation is so varied that the totals offer no sound basis for comparison. In one case, for example, a denomination may count baptized children as "members," while in another only adults who have had considerable training are so regarded.

About the only real value there is in such statistics is that they provide a rough basis for a very general estimate of the relative strength of any given organization in the total religious scene. They also provide a rough means of estimating the growth or lack of growth in specific organizations, although even this is not always possible, because with changes in the administration the methods of computation and reporting are frequently changed.

Given the imaginative quality which piety tends to infuse into religious statistical reports and the fact that many people in Japan at one and the same time are counted as adherents of a temple, worshippers of one or more shrines, and possibly as members of some other religious denomination, it is

inevitable that the total number of adherents will continue to exceed the population of the country! There is, therefore, every reason for caution in making comparisons and pronouncements based on such statistical reports.

At present the only comprehensive statistics in the field of religion in Japan are published in the "Religions Year Book" (*Shūkyō Nenkan*) issued by the Ministry of Education. For Christianity the best source for statistics is the "Christian Year Book" (*Kirisutokyo Nenkan*) published by the "Christian News" (*Kirisutokyo Shimbum*). Statistical information regarding non-Christian bodies can be secured from the headquarters of the various denominations and organizations. Generally speaking, however, with certain reservations, the information provided by the Ministry of Education is about as reliable as that which can be secured directly from the organizations concerned.

The following table gives the totals for Buddhism, Christianity, Shinto and other religions. More detailed statistics will be published in subsequent issues of the journal.

I RELIGIONS, LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS, CLERGY, AND ADHERENTS*

Religions	Local Organizations					Clergy—Adherents		
	Shrines	Temples	Churches	Preaching Places	Total			
Shinto	79,752	3	24,426	10,472	114,653	186,326	78,962,589	
Buddhism	15	74,887	5,544	10,074	90,520	127,705	44,063,907	
Christianity*	—	—	3,930	1,766	5,696	12,836	678,258	
Others	17	1	1,028	3,225	4,271	12,247	3,982,366	
Total	79,784	74,891	34,928	25,537	215,140	339,114	127,687,120	

* The statistics for Christianity are as of December 30, 1958 or March 31, 1959 and are taken from the 1960 "Christian Year Book" (*Kirisutokyo Nenkan*) published by the Christian News Co., (Kirisuto Shinbun Sha) Tokyo. Other statistics are as of December 30, 1957, and are taken from the 1958 "Religions Year Book" (*Shukyo Nenkan*), published by the Ministry of Education, Tokyo.