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Religious Life of the Japanese People

by Masaharu Anesaki (*Revised by Hideo Kishimoto*).
Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai, Tokyo.
1961, pp. 105.

The present reviewer was delighted to find that a popular introduction to Japanese religions, written by Professor Anesaki in 1936, and revised in 1938, was again to be published and felt that, with Professor Kishimoto's additions bringing the volume up to date, here would be a volume to recommend to all and sundry as an introduction to Japanese religious life. Not everyone can tackle Professor Anesaki's weightier volume on the *History of Japanese religion*, but his smaller volume, whilst not neglecting the historical background, had given a vivid picture of Japan's religious consciousness and what religion meant in real life. Whilst the revision is pleasantly produced from the standpoint of format, paper, print, etc., the present reviewer finds it a tremendous disappointment, and could not

honestly recommend the volume as widely as he would wish. (One gets the impression that, whilst the revision bears Professor Kishimoto's imprint, the work is actually that of lesser men.)

To enumerate a few reasons:

1) In reading Professor Anesaki's volumes in the past, the English-speaking reader has only occasional qualms about the English. The argument flows smoothly, and there are not the constantly recurring examples of "Japanese English," which can be somewhat irritating. The same cannot be said of the revision. Whilst the text of Dr. Anesaki has often been left as it was, at times it has been "emended" with the result that the English is decidedly inferior. The reviewer found 13 misprints and English infelicities in the first six pages, and

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then decided it was not worthwhile counting further. It is not that the meaning is obscure, although at times it only becomes clear when translated back into Japanese. Phrases such as "Mt. Fuji is getting too popular and secular by abundant climber"(p.24), "centering around" (ibid.), "The one with great vitality is the Tenri, which is the most pre-eminent in the present-day Japan in its strength of size and work as a unit church body" are annoying to the reader, because they are *not* English. Why — oh, why could not such a book, so excellently illustrated, be looked over by competent English speakers before being published by those who are concerned for "International Cultural Relations." Consistency in spelling would also be a good thing, whereas the volume blithely mingles American and English spelling. (Incidentally, should not a 1961 revision give us post-war Romanization? The present volume still uses "Kwannon" (p. 2, p. 61.), "Hongwanji"(p.65), "Seichō-no-Iye" (p. 97) and "shinsō-kwan" (p. 97).

2) In a book meant not for the

specialist, but for the general public, it is even more important that statistics quoted should be accurate, so as to give a true picture of trends. Let us take a look at those given for Christianity on p. 89, which are so strangely different from those put out by the International Institute for the Study of Religions! The Roman Catholic figure for 1960 is given as 212,963, and yet this figure had already been passed in 1955. (The 1962 figure is actually 296,617). We are told that the "Greek Orthodox" Church had 12,000 members in 1934 and 35,346 in 1960 — which would suggest a tremendous surge forward. The facts are the reverse, as leaders of that Church would be the first to assert. By lumping together "Baptist and other," one is given an increase from 57,000 in 1934 to 163,196 in 1960, but surely a breakdown is required here? Either give Baptist statistics separately or give the total as that of all other Protestant groups. The present statistics give the mistaken impression that the Baptists now form a sizeable group, almost as large as the United Church!

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In the case of Buddhism, we are told (p. 76) that there is “*little difference*” in the statistics as between 1934 and 1960, thus revealing “the inactive stabilized conditions of present-day Buddhist churches in Japan” — and yet we are then told (p. 77) that the Nichiren Sect numbered 3,381,000 in 1934 as against 10,608,000 in 1960. It is clear to even medium intelligence that both assertions cannot be true! The truth is probably that the difference is slight, and the data for Nichiren statistics in 1934 was inadequate.

3) Whilst the revision correctly indicates that the “New Religions” are not really new, there is an inadequate attempt to tie up postwar movements with their prewar beginnings. For example (p. 102), Risshō Kōsei Kai and Sōka Gakkai are postwar movements. On p. 97 there is reference to the prewar “Hito no Michi”, but there is no indication that this blossomed into PL. Reference is made to the suppression of Hito no Michi and Ōmoto. The reviser should have pointed out that the freedom of

religion in the postwar period permitted renewed efforts. The fact that Ōmoto influence is widely felt in many movements should perhaps have been mentioned.

4) The bibliography is quite good, and yet contains references to some works not readily available to the general reader, and omits other important works that are available. For example, surely we ought to have G. B. Sansom’s 2-volume *History of Japan* (1958, 1961) listed, as well as the new printing of W. G. Aston’s translation of the “*Nihongi*” (London, 1956)? In the field of the “New Religions,” reference might have been made to H. van Straelen’s work of *Ten-ri-kyō — The Religion of Divine Wisdom* (Kyoto, 1957), even though more recent works were not available at the time of publication. In the dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity, T. N. Callaway’s *Japanese Buddhism and Christianity* (Tokyo, 1957) should be listed.

Despite the many blemishes, the basic contents (as listed below) are unquestionably of a high standard, and one would hope for an early and careful revision, which would

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give the book its rightful place amongst introductions to present-day religion in Japan.

CONTENTS

I GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

(dealing with popular religious consciousness, family and community observances, and the clash between native and imported traits)

II SHINTO, THE INDIGENOUS RELIGION (dealing first with the actual worship of the shrine, its changing character, the attempt to systematize Shinto into a National Cult, and the rise and development of the Shinto Sects)

III CHINESE CULTURE : CONFUCIANISM AND TAOISM (which admirably deals with the significance of Confucianist Ethics for Japan and the impact of dualistic superstition on popular religion)

IV BUDDHISM : ITS RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL INFLUENCE (which covers a wide field in a most interesting way, contrasting the different traditions, as represented in the various sects and particularly

drawing out the differences between a pietistic (almost introspective) approach in the Amida sects with the extravert fervour of the Nichiren group, and gives due attention to the almost "polytheistic" expressions of popular Buddhism)

V CHRISTIANITY IN JAPAN : ITS MISSIONARY WORK & SOCIAL INFLUENCE (which is probably the least satisfactory of the chapters, but is best in the analysis of the tendencies and tensions of the early Meiji Period) (N. B. on p. 84. the date of the earliest foreign treaties is wrongly given as 1859 ; it should read "1858.")

VI THE PREWAR AND POSTWAR SITUATIONS (which first deals with the nationalist movement and then with the postwar freedom of expression, resulting in the mushrooming of new religious sects, and in the complete divorce of religion from the state — and incorporates some shrewd observations on Occupation policy !)

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