

THE NEW RELIGIONS

— A review article —

by

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Modern Japanese Religions, by C. B. Offner and H. Van Straelen, S.V.D., E.J. Brill, Leiden, R. Enderle, Tokyo, Twayne, N.Y., 1963, 296 pp. ¥. 1,600, outside Japan, \$ 8.00.

The publication of the first sizeable book in English on the New Religions of Japan is an event which draws attention for many reasons: the subject itself; the authors; the contents and methods used.

The Preface tells us that:

“It is perhaps the first time in history that a study of non-Christian religions has been written under the joint authorship of a Protestant and a Roman Catholic missionary. The former (Dr. Offner) is an American who has been engaged during the last twelve years in direct mission work in Japan. The latter (Dr. Van Straelen) is a Dutchman, who has been teaching in Japan since 1936 and who is presently a faculty member of Nanzan University in Nagoya. This book is primarily the result of an investigation conducted by Dr. Offner which formed the substance of his doctoral disserta-

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tion.¹ Dr. Van Straelen contributed material from his study of *Tenrikyō* in particular and made other contributions relating to the subject matter in general. The authors also worked together in their research as well as separately and divided their work in such a way as to achieve a comprehensive view of the different religions. Yet, both take responsibility for the whole publication.”

The book, published simultaneously in three countries,² is very attractive. It is superbly illustrated and fairly free of typographical errors. Its contents run over an Introduction, ten chapters, a conclusion, a glossary of Japanese terms, bibliography, and index. It reads very well, style and subject matter nicely combine to a pleasing whole. It will, no doubt, sell very well and should receive wide coverage in professional journals.

A look at the contents. The Introduction brings insights into the Japanese ways of thinking with special reference

¹ *The Doctrine and Practice of Faith Healing in Modern Japanese Religions*, a dissertation submitted by Clark B. Offner to the Faculty of the Northern Baptist Theological Seminary in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Theology, Chicago, Illinois, May, 1961, 318 p. — The typewritten copy which I consulted was loaned to me by the International Institute for the Study of Religions. Handwritten corrections have been added, presumably by Dr. Offner. Some of them have been entered into the book under review; others not. In the book there is no reference to this thesis beyond the two lines quoted. The title is not given.

² I am told that the edition for Holland and some copies distributed in Japan have Dr. Van Straelen's name first; the American edition has Dr. Offner's name first on the title page.

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to Hajime Nakamura's *The Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples*. The difficulty of a scientific investigation of the New Religions is clearly set forth. The method used is described. A one page long quotation from an article by Wm. P. Woodard tells us how to interpret denominations and statistics. This is followed by a chapter on "The New Religions in General." The authors are at pains to clarify the concept. A full page quotation in French (p. 24) throws light on Father Chery's notion of a sect.

It will be remarked that the title of the book under review is *Modern Japanese Religions*, while in the body of the book the qualification "modern" has been dropped throughout. The explanation is perhaps found in the fact that "since this study concerns certain modern Japanese religions rather than New Religions as such, the explicit content of the term need not cause a problem. Suffice it to say that in this study the term is used as a convenient designation for all the religions included in this investigation" (p. 25). The importance and general characteristics of the New Religions are then described. The composite portrait of founders (pp. 30-32) is taken from an article by this reviewer.³ A survey of representative religions based

³ Joseph J. Spae, "The Religions of Japan." *Missionary Bulletin* (not *The Japan M.B.*). 1956. p. 127-129. Here and in other places Dr. Van Straelen, who presumably contributed this note (Dr. Offner had no access to the *Missionary Bulletin* in writing his thesis) uses a quote within a quote. This is, needless to say, misleading. Thus the long note on p. 31 (see also p. 38) looks as if the authors wrote it. It would be preferable to follow standard usage. A similar fact had already been pointed out and deplored by E.D. Seidensticker in his review of Dr. Van Straelen's *The Religion of Divine Wisdom*, *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. XIII, 1957, pp. 368-371.

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upon the oft-quoted but somewhat out-dated article of Baiyū Watanabe in *Monumenta Nipponica*, 1957, concludes this interesting chapter.

Chapter 3 is on Tenrikyō, The Religion of Divine Wisdom. This chapter shows Dr. Van Straelen at ease in a subject which he has studied for years. His book (now in a revised edition) is still the standard work on Tenrikyō, and Dr. Offner, in his thesis, often refers to it. Following this are Ōmoto and related religions, PL Kyōdan, Seichō-no-Ie, Sekai Kyūseikyō, and then the Nichiren-related Buddhistic religions, Reiyū Kai, Rissō Kōsei Kai, and Sōka Gakkai. This concludes what might be called the historical part of the book. For each religion a good number of interesting and relevant details are given. The overall picture, as the authors admit, is fragmentary; and it could hardly be otherwise considering that heretofore published information by the New Religions themselves and even critical studies by Japanese and foreign scholars have hardly gone beyond amenities and superficialities. I would have welcomed in the treatment of these religions a further push, and a more critical — if friendly approach. The authors emphasize the latter more than the former, and the reader is at sea as to where they themselves stand.

Now, I should say in their defense (and I speak from experience) that the matter is not as simple as it looks, and there is perhaps on the side of the researcher a subconscious fear that, by pushing beyond what he is told to what he is not told but somehow suspects, the naked truth might shock and offend both his readers and his interview-

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ers. The authors are aware of this (p. 268) and only their kindness prevents them, it seems, from bringing it into the open. Moreover, many texts talk for themselves and add up to a surprisingly big package of credulity which the ordinary believer must have if he is to stay with most of these religions. The authors, consequently, are right in counting on the intelligence of the reader, even though at times he might have preferred to get their frank and personal opinions.

What might be called the second part of the book, and the most valuable and original, now follows. Here is the core of Dr. Offner's thesis, and these chapters concentrate on the important and interesting phenomenon of faith healing, in view of which the selection of religions treated here has been established. The description, as in the first part, largely limits itself to externals as seen in the publications of these religions. The "metaphysical background" (by which is meant: teaching regarding the spiritual world) is described and its ancestry traced to Buddhist and Shinto beliefs. The researchers then narrow their scope and bring interesting details about the traditional Japanese concept of deity. Little of this will sound new to the scholar of Japanese thought; but it is happily brought together in a few pages, and the overall impression is excellent. The authors then enter further into their subject: successive chapters telling us of "the cause of sickness," "the cure of sickness," "healing methods," and "the effectiveness of the new religions" — specifically of their healing powers. The book ends with a Conclusion in which matters of culture

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and religion are discussed and many opinions found in Dr. Van Straelen's other books repeated or brought up to date.⁴

Modern Japanese Religions, is, everything well considered, a book which many will want to read. In view of the unusual fact that two scholars wrote it jointly, and that, in the words of the advertising literature, this "is an ecumenical gesture of far-reaching importance," one wants to know more about its origin. Co-authorship poses its own problems of responsibility and scientific probity. In similar cases the contribution of the one and the other author is often clearly indicated, say, by the use of their initials. In the case of the book under review, the co-authors have limited themselves to the statement found in the preface and quoted above.

It is no exaggeration to say, as they indeed do, that "this book is primarily the result of an investigation conducted

⁴ A last *nota ex machina* is found on p. 266, where Dr. Van Straelen takes up the cudgels in favor of Dr. L. Elders. After a page-long French text, it is apparent that a rebuttal to another article is intended. This article (disagreeing with Dr. Elders) is, says Dr. Van Straelen, "not too clear. The author seems to dodge the real issue." One deprecates this habit of bringing in interesting but forensic matter, pitting one scholar against another, and leaving the reader up in the air. Another similar and embarrassing example is found on p. 116, note 6. Dr. Offner in *not Thesis* (p. 76) has the text of this note: a reference to Suzuki's *The Essence of Buddhism*. The rest has been added by Dr. Van Straelen and consists of a quotation from Koestler's *The Lotus and the Robot* to finish with three lines in German, a comment, out of context, by the missiologist Dr. Th. Ohm telling the reader (who knows German) that "*das alles hat einen anderen Klang als das, was H. Dumoulin und Enomiya-Lassalle über das Zen geschrieben haben.*" It is doubtful whether anybody but those initiated in worthy but here perfectly irrelevant discussion between specialists will know what this is all about.

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by Dr. Offner which formed the substance of his doctoral dissertation." A cursory comparison between the book and his thesis shows the extent of Dr. Offner's share to be about 90% of the total number of pages. Dr. Van Straelen as stated in the Preface, "Contributed material from his study on *Tenrikyō* in particular and made other contributions relating to the subject matter in general." By this is meant that material on *Tenrikyō* originally found in the thesis (pp. 32-38) has been copied and expanded in the text of this book (pp. 43-59). Dr. Offner in his thesis acknowledges his original source. Unfortunately no references to Father Van Straelen's book on *Tenrikyō* are given in the text as accepted practice would have it. Dr. Van Straelen also contributed the long and often irrelevant quotations in the notes. Here he uses French, German, English, and Dutch. Another addition to the thesis, especially in the first, descriptive part of the book, is material lifted from the *Missionary Bulletin*, unfortunately again, with two or three exceptions, without quoting the source.⁵ The bibliography found in a dozen articles on the new religions in the *Missionary Bulletin*, and unknown to the thesis, has been put to good use, with the exception of only a few books, such as *Shukyō, Kōshitsu* 宗教、皇室 (*Religion and the Imperial Family*) by Sōichi Ōyake 大宅壯一, published by Chikuma Shobo 筑摩書房, Tokyo, 1959, and *Shinkō Shūkyō Tokuhon* 新興宗教読本 (*Reader in the New Religions*) published by

⁵ Thus whole sentences have been copied literally: p. 25, line 1 is in *Missionary Bulletin* 1956, p. 126; p. 28, paragraph before last, is *Ibid.*, p. 127; p. 36. 1. 4-6 is *Ibid.*, p. 277.

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Jinja Shimpo Sha 神社新報社 Tokyo, 1959. One is, however, surprised to find no reference to a very important source of information on the new religions, the *Shin Shūkyō Shim-bun* 新宗教新聞, the newspaper published in Tokyo by the Union of New Religious Organizations in Japan, while seven fairly unknown publications of Tenrikyō are enumerated among the periodicals in the Japanese language. A similar unbalance could be pointed out in many parts of the book.

Modern Japanese Religions, I feel, will easily sell out, and, as was the case with former books by Dr. Van Straelen, run into future reprints. This prospect might be an excuse for pointing out a few errors, of which the book is remarkably free: p. 71, Taniguchi was not born in Kobe, but near Kobe; p. 73, for “*Love of Mind Action*”, read “*Love of Mind in Action*”; p.84, for Hito no Michi founded in “1924,” read “1925”; p. 85 “as Kyōso 教祖”: the reading is here *Oshieoya* (Cf. p. 88); p. 96, note 9, for “Kongen Fukuwara 服原良元” (the thesis, p. 61, romanizes this name Ryogen Fukuwara; the reconstruction to *kanji* confuses *kon* 良 and *ryō* 良), read Ryōgen Fukuhara 福原亮嚴; p. 115, for Sōkyō Ono (also in note 4), read “Sokyō Ono.” P. 32 for “Japanese New Religions,” read “The New Religions of Japan”; p. 34, for *genserieki*, read “*genzeriyaku*”; p. 223, for “*shōsai kokoroe*,” read “*shosei*...”

In conclusion, I would personally have wished, as I said, for greater daring in checking facts and statements. I fail to see why several references in Dr. Offner's thesis to his personal contact with his interviewees were omitted in this book, and why, on p. 168, Dr. Offner's “I am not aware...”

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(Thesis p. 140) was changed into "we are..." Surely, it would not offend good taste if the individual personalities of the co-authors had been kept distinguishable in their reactions to important matters.

The intention of the above remarks is to help the future researcher. For the authors are aware that much remains to be done. Here is an interesting subject which, if viewed in the light of Japanese history and modern social sciences may lead to important discoveries, also of an ecumenical nature. We wish the authors well in such a venture.

Kanji Glossary

genze-riyaku 現世利益	Seichō-no-Ie 生長の家
kanji 漢字	Sekai Kyūsei-kyō 世界救世教
Kyodan 教団	Shosei kokoroe 廻世心得
Nichiren 日蓮	Soka Gakkai 創価学会
Ōmoto 大本	Suzuki, Daisetz 鈴木大拙
Ono, Sokyō 小野祖教	Tenri-kyō 天理教
Reiyū Kai 霊友会	Watanabe, Baiyū 渡辺樸雄
Risshō Kōsei Kai 立正佼成会	