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Nihon no Shinko Shukyo*

(“The Newly Established Religions in Japan”)

by *Hiroo Takagi*

Tokyo: Iwanami New Books, 1959 pp. 209 ¥100.

There are very few scholars in the field of religion who are making the so-called “newly established religions” the main object of their study. There are four reasons for this.

1. As the name implies, these organizations are a relatively recent phenomenon and hence are lacking in historical background.

2. Because they have been looked down upon and criticized as vulgar, there has been a tendency among the scholars of religion to regard them as “vulgar religions” unworthy of being studied.

3. Because they have been so much despised and criticized by outsiders, the leaders of these organizations until quite recently have shut themselves off from outside students and journalists.

4. Study in this field is very undeveloped and difficult.

The author of this book, Hiroo

Takagi, an assistant professor of Tōyō University and one of the very few to enter this field, is a very earnest and noteworthy scholar.

Each student of these new organizations has his own special manner of approach. In Prof. Takagi's case, he seems for the time being to be mainly concerned with clarifying the “newly established religions” from the standpoint of the mass-thought movement. In addition to visiting their headquarters and central churches, talking directly with their leaders or believers, and examining their publications, he has investigated the religious life of the people in towns, villages, and smaller communities throughout the country, and thus has accumulated a great deal of background data regarding them. To date very few reports of such studies have been published. Therefore, in order to better under-

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stand this book, I want to refer to some of the principal studies that he has already produced.

In "The Religious Life of the Japanese People,"* there is a rather long article by Prof. Takagi, which is a study of the religious life of the common people based on regional investigations in local villages and hamlets, and is not necessarily limited to a study of the "newly established religions." It is, however, very interesting because this is the first report of any study of them by Prof. Takagi and suggests the direction to be taken in his later studies. (Incidentally, in the same volume there are two short articles, one on "The Characteristics of the Newly Established Religions" by Mr. Iichi Oguchi, an Assistant Professor of Tokyo University, and one by this reviewer entitled "About the New Religions.")

A second article is to be found in a volume entitled "Psychology of Religion and Faith,"† which was written jointly by Prof. Takagi, Prof. Oguchi, and two other scholars. This article consists of three parts. Part I contains a description of religious experiences in various "newly established religions." Part II examines these experiences from the standpoint of psycho-pathology and social psychology. Part III consists of somewhat fragmentary reports of this research. The article reveals the "progressive" attitude of this group of scholars, including Prof. Takagi, toward the "newly established religions."

"The Newly Established Religions," published by Kōdan-sha (講談社) in June, 1958, as one of the "Million Books" series, is the first separate volume written independently by Prof. Takagi. Its

* Takagi, Hiroo 高木宏夫, *Nihonjin no Shūkyō Seikatsu* 日本人の宗教生活. ("Religious Life of the Japanese People.") in *Gendai Shūkyō Kōza* 現代宗教講座 ("Modern Religious Studies") Vol. V. Tokyo: Sōbun-sha 創文社 1955.

† Takagi, Hiroo 高木宏夫, Oguchi, Ichi 小口偉一, and others, *Shūkyō to Shinkō no Shinrigaku* 宗教と信仰の心理学 ("Psychology of Religion and Faith") in *Shin Shinrigaku Kōza* 新心理学講座 ("New Psychological Studies") Vol. IV. Tokyo: Kawade Shobō 河出書房 1956.

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contents are divided into four chapters:

- I The Birth of the Newly Established Religions.
- II What the Masses Seek in the Newly Established Religions.
- III The Appeal of the Newly Established Religions.
- IV The Social Role of the Newly Established Religions.

Let me quote the author's preface in this volume.

The believers (of the "newly established religions") do not consist of disorderly crowds, but are organized around a definite set of teachings. There is no greater mass organization and no stronger unity to be found in Japan. . . . The newly established religions are organizations which display great mass energy. The believers are not special people, but are like you and me. Let us look at them again before we despise and ridicule them. In the light of this idea I have written this book for the purpose of raising some questions.

Here we find the author's special purpose, which is consistent throughout the book and can be seen clearly in the above table of contents.

"The Newly Established Religions

in Japan," the book under review, is Mr. Takagi's latest work. It is one of the series of Iwanami New Books (岩波新書) and was published in November, 1959. However, the title is misleading. In fact, the section dealing exclusively with the subject of the book does not constitute a very large part of the volume. This can be noted from the following table of contents:

- I The Religious Life of the Japanese.
- II Mass Thought Movements since the Meiji Era.
- III Mass Thought Movements after World War II.
- IV The Movement Form of the Newly Established Religions Movement.
- V Various Problems Raised by the Newly Established religions.
- IV Some Conclusions.

These chapter headings show clearly that the volume as a whole is not limited to a description of only the "newly established religions."

In explaining his position the author writes as follows:

The scientific study of the newly

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established religions hitherto has been solely focused on criticism of the doctrines and has been almost totally lacking in any analysis from the viewpoint of the mass thought movement. The present day newly established religions, if viewed only from the standpoint of their doctrines, contain very vulgar teachings and are backward and stagnant. Their social and political roles are reactionary . . . The total number of the believers of these newly established religions is about eight million, or about 10 percent of the total population of Japan. Everybody would be struck with terror if they thought that this huge number of people had become slaves of strange doctrines and played a reactionary role. It is necessary for us to estimate properly their originality and energy and to help them out of the wrong thought movement and orient them in the right direction.

As can be readily seen from this statement, the author studies the structure of the "newly established religions" and looks into the reason why they have become a source of such great energy in the mass thought movement. He would like to apply this energy to the "pro-

gressive" and social-scientific mass thought movement and also clarify what measures should be taken in order to orient their — from the point of view of the author— mistaken conservative, reactionary thought movement and make it into—again as the author sees it—a correct social-scientific, "progressive" mass thought movement.

For this purpose, Prof. Takagi gives a history of the mass thought movement since the Meiji era, including the establishment of the Emperor System; he clarifies the reasons why the "newly established religions" made such a sudden rise after World War II and replaced the emphasis on the Emperor; he emphasizes the fact that the cause for their development lay in attaching importance to member-participation in the dissemination of the teachings; he points out the defect of the social-scientific mass movement as being too idealistic; and finally he tries to make some big suggestions as to how this movement should develop in the future.

This book may be said to be a presentation of a part of his study

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on the “newly established religions” from the standpoint of socialism, which presumably the author personally advocates. It should not be overlooked, however, that his view of the “newly established religions” has been acquired after some years of study in regional research, and consequently contains many valuable ideas that are worth listening to.

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