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The World's Living Religions

By Robert E. Hume

New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959 Completely revised. 335pp. \$3.50

Former students and friends of the late Dr. Robert E. Hume will welcome the "completely revised" edition of "The World's Living Religions," and those who have lost their copy of an earlier edition will be glad to have the new volume. However, as the preface to the new edition clearly indicates, this is anything but a complete revision and, if the material related to religions in Japan is any criterion, there was no good reason for re-publication.

In reference to new postwar religious movements in this country, we read that over 700 "new religious and sect" were "registered in the department of government which has to do with the religions," and that "some 600 of these arose during or immediately after the Second World War." The facts regarding these postwar religious movements were presented on page 70, Vol. I, No. 2 of *Contemporary*

Religions in Japan, so this need not detain us here.

On page 174 in discussing the emergence of Sectarian Shinto, so-called, it is implied that Christianity was recognized by the government before these sects were recognized as independent bodies; but Christianity was not officially recognized by the national government until the enactment of the Religious Organizations Law of 1939! The ordinance providing for police supervision of Christian churches (Home Ministry Ordinance No. 41, July 27, 1899) was promulgated fifteen years after the ordinance (Council of State Ordinance No. 19, August 11, 1884) which set up "Sectarian Shinto" and had nothing to do with its emergence.

Although it states on p. 81 that Buddhism in Japan and China has "won its largest and most active group of followers" and that in these countries "its doctrines have

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been most changed from their original form," Chinese and Japanese Buddhism, that is, Mahayana Buddhism, receives such scant attention as to be of little or no value.

Concerning Shinto, an entire chapter of twenty-four pages is devoted to it, but so much of the information is out-dated and the additions and revisions are so inadequate that, as far as understanding Shinto in Japan today is concerned, it would have been better if the book had not been re-published. For example, pages 154—156 are devoted to the "sacred" scriptures of Shinto, but the word "sacred" is definitely not appropriate in connection with the *Kojiki* or the *Nihon Shoki*, and the *Manyōshū* has never been regarded as a scripture of the Shinto faith. These are classics and valuable sources for Shinto, but they are not considered "sacred" in any sense that the word is generally used.

On page 162, where reference is made to the custom of having an Imperial princess as high priestess

of the Grand Shrine of Ise, the author says that the custom "has been maintained throughout a period longer than the entire history of Christianity." However, even if we accept the pre-war official chronology, (the legendary date for the establishment of Ise was 5 B.C.) there were several periods—one lasting more than a century—when the custom was not observed. In the Meiji era the Japanese term for the office was changed and an Imperial prince was appointed. Then finally in 1946, after the disestablishment of Shrine Shinto, because all the Imperial princes had been purged as military officers, the former Princess Kitashirakawa was appointed. (Actually the purge did not apply to religious organizations and functionaries, but in many cases the institutions involved refrained from appointing purgees to prominent positions.) Consequently, and in view of the fact that the present high priestess is a widow and not, as in ancient times, a virgin princess, it can hardly be said that custom as now observed is of any great antiquity.