

POSTSCRIPT

The March 1964 Issue of Contemporary Religions in Japan

Interfaith Conference

The Editor is to be commended on a most interesting number of this journal, although the present writer feels that it is rather like the proverbial curate's egg — “good in parts.” No one would gainsay the value of interfaith conferences, but the present report of one, which sought to be “international,” inasmuch as foreigners resident in Japan participated, leaves much to be desired.

Whilst it is good for an ordinary religionist to express his convictions and seek to interpret his faith, an Institute which is devoted to the *Study of Religions* should give (I feel) a more scholarly and balanced presentation of Islam and the other topics of discussion. The Japanese participants come out much better, as they are experts in their fields — which was hardly fair towards the Muslim “amateurs” — even though they make a credible enough contribution as “layman”! One cannot help perceiving a “propagandist” note in much of what was said, and it was left for Mr. Ueda, the Shintoist, to point out the possibility of a distinction between religion and culture.

The foreign reader on Islam can enter far more deeply into the dialogue between that faith, Judaism and Christianity, whilst a Japanese, who has only such a report to go on, will have only a superficial and probably mistaken understanding

of Islam's basic position. Seeing that Islam is the leading missionary faith in Africa, and is now active, too, in the U.S.A., the contrast with "missionary" Christianity is somewhat strange! I can only add my regret that Christianity was not represented by those who are more representative of Christianity, and that the Buddhists, too, were not more widely represented.

Non-Churchism

We have also the last installment of Dr. Norman's work on Uchimura. A summarizing (if there is not re-writing with emphasis on salient points) is always a bit unsatisfactory, as one is left with a stream of facts and information. This installment, however, does point very clearly to Uchimura's dilemma over organization. There must be the Church as well and the denial of the Church!

New Religious Sects

Most interesting of all in this issue is undoubtedly the section on recent books — and particularly the review by Japanese writers on Mr. Thomsen's recent book on *The New Religions of Japan*. It is refreshing to find that no punches are barred and that the reviewers were not restrained by a false "politeness." We were promised a book long ago by the Institute on the New Religions to be written by Mr. Ōishi, and his long review article only increases one's regret that it is not forthcoming. He is probably *the* expert on the new religions, although he points out that there is no real specialist who can objectively size up what is still a fluid situation. The comments by Tenri-kyō, Seichō-No-Ie, and Ōmoto religionists on

the book indicate the importance of checking one's facts. Whilst the foreign writer is entitled to his own opinion and interpretation, there is no excuse for factual error, when there are Japanese experts around to whom one's writings can be submitted for checking. It is also important, as the comment from Seichō-No-Ie indicates, to check up any English sources, that are being quoted with the Japanese original. Lack of space did not permit, one presumes, a statement of the "real" situation as seen by the writers. Too often there is reference to something as "fiction" without an indication of what is "fact."

Book Reviews

The Editor's reviews of books and journals are brief and to the point. It is a pity that we could not have had a more detailed and *even more critical* review of *The Japan Christian Year Book* for 1963. The overall editorial work of that volume certainly leaves very "much to be desired." Bishop Yashiro could surely claim to be included amongst prominent Japanese Christians — and a number of other notables are also omitted. What is tragic is that this book will be regarded outside Japan as the authoritative source book on Japanese Christianity . . . The volume by Dr. Olds' certainly warrants attention, even though it would seem (to some critics) to go beyond a "dialogue."

Chronology

I would query the value of the Chronology in its present format. Would it not be much more profitable to have survey articles on "Leading Issues in Japanese Buddhism during 1963,"

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“Movements in Shinto in 1963,” etc., etc. A journal of this kind should be more selective, and indicate its criteria of selection. Events need weighing as well as listing.

Criticism apart, the present writer cannot but confess that the *pot-pourri* is eminently readable and provocative.

Raymond Hammer

Central Theological College
Tokyo