

REVIEWS

The Catholic Church in Japan since 1859

by Joseph L. Van Hecken C. I. C. M.

*Translated and revised by John Van Hoydonck, O. M. I.
Tokyo: Herder Agency, Enderle Bookstore, illustrated,
index, pp. 317, ¥1,800 or \$6.50.*

"*The Catholic Church in Japan since 1859*" by Fr. Joseph L. Van Hecken, C. I. C. M., is the first publication in the English language to provide an overall picture of the Catholic Church during the past century. It is most welcome, therefore, not only for what it tells of the growth of the Church and its related activities, but because it is the only handy English-language reference volume with concise information about the Church today. The author has not added significantly to our knowledge of Church, but he has brought together a large amount of useful information—not otherwise available in such a convenient form—and he has drawn an understandable picture of the Church and its activities which have been *terra incognita* to most outsiders.

To be sure, considerable information has been published about the Church during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and also about the early years of Meiji, but very little has been written in English for the general public about the Church today. The original French edition, which first appeared in 1959 in connection with the centenary of the revival of the Church, has been translated and revised by Fr. John Van Hoydonck, O. M. I., in such natural English that the reader is not aware that it is, in fact, a translation. Whether the revision involved anything more than the addition of the few pertinent items of interest necessary to bring the work up to date is not indicated.

The scope of the publication is such that it was not possible for

REVIEWS

the author, within the limitations of some three hundred pages, to include much background information or human interest stories, and nothing has been discussed in much detail. However, enough has been given so that the account is very readable for the average interested reader. Moreover, it is written so that the average Protestant reader will have little or no difficulty understanding the text even though the precise meaning of some terms may not always be entirely clear. In some places the data seems somewhat too sketchy, but to have done otherwise inevitably would have made the volume unduly large. As it is, it is packed with valuable information as to what transpired in the period covered, and with sufficient footnotes and bibliographic data to enable the student who wishes to pursue any subject further to know at once where to find what he wants.

The volume is divided into three sections. Part I deals with the revival and expansion of the Church from the middle of the 19th century, with special emphasis on the formation of the dioceses of which

there are now fifteen, all under the ministration of Japanese bishops. Part II discusses the numerous activities of the Church under the general heading of "Directives," that is, the over-all administration of the Hierarchy, the press, education, charity, social action, and the contributions of the Church in the fields of science and art. Part III is concerned with the local clergy, the contemplative and active religious life, the lay apostolate, and Japan's relation with the Vatican.

While recognizing the impossibility of giving much background or interpretive material in a volume of this size, this reviewer cannot help but wonder whether some omissions were due solely to the limitations of space, to a preoccupation with the affairs of the Church itself, or to a different evaluation of events from what, for example, this reviewer, or even another Catholic writer, might have made in choosing what to include. For example, there is no mention of the Three Religions Conference of 1912, nothing about the effect on Christianity of the American Exclusion Act of 1924, and the record is com-

pletely silent about the generally acknowledged benefits which the Church enjoyed under the Allied Occupation.

Moreover, although the difficulties that arose in connection with the Shrine Problem in the 1930s are given ample attention, the solution finally arrived at is expressed in such vague terms on page 121 that even a generally well-informed reader will be left in some doubt as to what the actual decision of the Church was on this important matter. Certainly no one would suspect, as Fr. Joseph J. Spae, C. I. C. M., clearly states in his book on *Catholicism in Japan* (p. 16) that on the basis of a "declaration by the Ministry of Education" it was decided that, since "official worship at the shrines was of a nonreligious, patriotic nature,"... Catholics were allowed "to offer obeisance at the shrines as a matter of civic duty."

Finally, it seems appropriate to call attention to a few minor errors in order that these may be corrected in the next printing. For example, the Japanese Government worked on a bill to control religions from 1897, and not from 1926, as implied

on page 118. The Religious Organizations Law of 1939 was ordered abolished by the Civil Liberties Directive of October 4, 1945, but it was not actually abrogated until December 28,—not on November 4, as stated on page 96. The Shinto Directive was issued on December 15 (not December 12) and it did not, as alleged on page 96, abolish "the obligatory reading of the Meiji Rescript on Education." As a matter of fact, it did not even mention it. Of a different nature is the omission of a table of abbreviations for references to sources in the footnotes. These apparently are given in the footnote where each reference is first used, but this is difficult for a person who picks up the volume to check on a single item.

Of greater importance is the unfortunate reference on page 59 to the comparative growth of Catholic and Protestant churches during the last decade of the 18th and the first decade of the 19th century. Religious statistics are, at best, difficult to handle, and no comparisons of this nature should ever be made without careful verification. Typographical errors alone can cause considerable

REVIEWS

misunderstanding. It is suggested, therefore, that the paragraph in question be either checked and revised or be omitted in any re-printing of the book.

In spite of these relatively minor matters which, except for the last

item, in no way seriously detract from the importance of the volume, the book is a valuable one and all who wish to know about the Catholic Church in modern Japan should read it. W. P. W.