

Norman ANDERSON, ed. *The world's religions*. London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975. Paperback. 244 pp. including index. £1.95

After a college course on world religions followed by a chance to live in Japan and compare what the textbook said with what I saw about me, I developed, I must confess, an extremely cautious attitude toward handbooks of this type. This attitude has, if anything, only been reinforced by encounter with other handbooks (which shall here remain nameless). One example will suffice. Shinto, a recent team of authors coolly informs us, is comprised of three forms, namely, the family cult (with the *kamidana*), the cult of the city (devoted to the *ujigami*), and the cult of the state (centering in the emperor). Even a beginning student of Japanese culture does not need long, when confronted by such a gross misrepresentation of the *ujigami* concept, to suspect the uncritical introduction of prefabricated categories.

Other handbooks, however, have deservedly come by their excellent reputation. One thinks, for example, of John B. Noss, *Man's religions*, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan Co., 1963).

More modest in scope, but eminently worthy of consideration, is the book under review.

To pretend to enough competence to review the book in its entirety would be presumptuous in the extreme. This review, therefore, will focus solely on the chapter devoted to Shinto, and an attempt will be made to get at its distinctiveness by comparing and contrasting it with the Shinto chapter in the Noss book. But first a word about its author.

Dr. Clark B. Offner, a missionary of the Catholic Christian Church, has been a resident of Japan since 1951 (except for brief periods in the U.S.). He holds degrees from the University of Dubuque, New York University, New York Theological Seminary, and Northern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has also undertaken post-doctoral studies at the University of Chicago. With Henry van Straelen, he is the author of *Modern Japanese religions: With special emphasis upon their doctrines of healing* (Leiden: E. J. Brill; Tokyo; Rupert Enderle; New York: Twayne, 1963).

It is perhaps no coincidence that John Noss, the author of the work here proposed as a standard, is a man of direct, long-term acquaintance with Japan. Noss was raised in the Tōhoku, the son of a missionary family still represented there.

The outstanding difference between Noss's account of Shinto and Offner's can be put thus: Noss's is primarily a historical survey with passing attention to Shinto as a religious system, whereas Offner's is primarily a systematic presentation with passing attention to Shinto history.

Noss, after recounting the basic Shinto myth, moves immediately into a consideration of "the Shinto myth in Japanese history." This permits him to deal with such matters as the composite nature of the myth, its social background, the effect of Chinese religion and culture, the emergence of *ryōbu* or mixed Shinto allegedly owing its existence to Buddhism, the seventeenth century revival, and subsequent developments through and since 1945. Only in his conclusion does Noss say a word about Shinto worship in the home and at the shrine.

Offner, after relating the same myth, takes up the meaning of the kami concept and the myth-inculcated values of social harmony and ritual purity. He follows this with a vivid description of Shinto worship: the *kamidana* or home altar; the shrine with its *torii*, ablution pavilion, and sanctuary; the four elements of purification, offering,

prayer, and sacred meal; and an all-too-brief section on Shinto festivals and ceremonies. Only then does he take a few pages to cover the chief events in Shinto history, quickly returning, however, to another systematic discussion of the "present characteristics of Shinto."

With regard to factual accuracy, neither author can be faulted. Both offer sound, sane surveys.

It does seem, though, that while Noss's historical presentation is vivid and compelling, his systematic account is bland and blessedly brief. Offner's, conversely, is vivid and bland in precisely the opposite way. One is led to conclude, therefore, that the two can well be used as complements—and this I intend as high praise for Offner's chapter on Shinto.

The other chapters in this book are: Religions of pre-literary societies, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and A Christian approach to comparative religion.

The main reservation I have about this book is one that applies to all handbooks on specific religions: they cover only what fits their subject, which means they necessarily omit much of the religious life of vibrant, struggling, celebrating, weeping human beings. To read the chapter on Shinto is to be left completely in the dark about such matters as fortune-telling, geomancy, warding away evil, rites of passage, ascetic practices, religious pilgrimages, and the like—all of which are very much alive in present-day Japan. An approach that names a religion and describes it, then moves to another and does the same, leaves the reader wondering how these dichotomized masses of fact and opinion fit together in the lives of concrete persons, human networks, and social institutions. The handbook approach has its place, and we can only be grateful for work of such high quality as that demonstrated by Offner. But perhaps we would do well to stop producing handbooks for a while and turn our eyes toward the harder task of field studies that will, little by little, further understanding of the interplay between religious rites and values, on the one hand, and human attitudes and behavior on the other.

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