

MURAKAMI Shigeyoshi, *Japanese religion in the modern century*. H. BYRON EARHART, transl. Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1980. xvii + 186 pp., including appendices, bibliography, and index. ¥2,500.

Several years ago, when I first read Murakami's *Nihon hyakunen no shūkyō*, of which the book under review is a translation, I ended it thinking, "This is a book it would be good to see in English." By good fortune, it has found a worthy translator. Moreover, the English version even contains some materials not published in the Japanese original of 1968.

Focusing on the period from 1868 to the present, this book is marked by two features that make it unusually interesting. First, it is far more than a scissors-and-paste resumé of the denominational histories on which it draws. Selecting material from these histories, the author weaves strands from the religious world into strands from the political world, thus fashioning a picture of politico-religious trends and developments that would otherwise be hard to come by. Second, the author is a Marxist, and this orientation is decisive both in his selection of materials and in the interpretation he gives them. To some this might seem reason enough to dismiss the book out of hand, but I should like to argue the contrary.

Admittedly, Murakami comes to the facts armed with a perspective that provides him with a general frame of reference. Within this framework he formulates situationally oriented interpretations that, to an outsider, appear highly predictable – so predictable, in fact, that the book almost looks like an exercise in foregone conclusions. It would be easy to write it off as a book-length example of bias. To do so, however, would deprive us of two things: factual data, and an account of developing trends that just might turn out to be right.

Under the heading of factual data, the standard charge against Marxists (or anybody who purports to combine objective research with commitment to a particular world view and value-system) is that they have eyes only for facts that support their perspective. Their orientation prevents them from presenting all the facts. Consciously or unconsciously, they *select* certain facts and withhold the rest.

This charge may well be true. Since Kant, no one doubts that concepts guide percepts – at least until experiences give us new eyes and lead us to reformulate our concepts. It is also true, however, despite

the courtroom oath to tell "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," that nobody, whatever his or her discipline, even pretends to present *all* the facts, not even all the *known* facts. This is not ordinarily a matter of concealment with an intent to mislead. It is a matter of determining what is *relevant* to a particular situation or argument. Without a sense for the relevant, one could reel off facts ad infinitum, jumbling the significant and the trivial into a spate of incoherent rambling. If Murakami selects certain facts and ignores or suppresses others, this can mislead us only to the extent that we allow ourselves to remain ignorant of other studies. The burden of responsibility falls, therefore, not on the author but on the reader.

But even if one is limited to the facts that Murakami chooses to present, there is still a sense in which this book can be recommended.

When I was studying theology, I had occasion to dip into a number of books on the history of Christian thought. One book (which shall here remain nameless) gradually came to attract me more than the rest. It was written by a conservative Lutheran whose theological views struck me as narrow in the extreme. But perhaps for this very reason, his biases were easily discernible. Fortunately — a crucial point — he was also a widely read and capable scholar. It proved possible, therefore, to distinguish fact from interpretation rather easily in his case. And he was a reliable guide to the facts.

Murakami too, so far as I can see, is a reliable guide to the facts. He may not present *all* the facts, but what he does present is solid and verifiable. Moreover, he usually gives some kind of signal to the reader when he shifts from objective description to interpretation. It is fairly easy, therefore, to distinguish between the two and to decide for oneself what elements in the interpretation are worth retaining.

In Murakami's account of politico-religious developments and trends, the most conspicuous feature is his oft-reiterated view that reactionary forces in the worlds of government, religion, and capitalistic business are well on their way toward restoring an emperor-centered Shinto to the status of a legally non-religious public religion. This is a step he deplors. He challenges religious people, clergy and lay alike, to shoulder their "social responsibility to protect the freedom of religion" (p. 167). In expressing this fear and articulating this challenge, he shows himself to be not only a scholar who can present factual data objectively and a committed man with a perspective that shapes

his interpretations, but also a person who engages himself in politico-religious issues with a view to creating the kind of awareness that can lead to mobilization of personnel and resources for the purpose of bringing pressure to bear on policy- and lawmakers who shape tomorrow's Japan. Whether Murakami is right in predicting the (still resistible) restoration of some form of State Shinto is, in my view, hardly open to question. Even scholars whose perspectives lead them to other conclusions would probably agree that the somber picture he paints is very plausible – though lightened to some extent by the recollection that of all the countries in Asia today, Japan is perhaps the only place where his book could be openly published.

At the same time, however, one would be remiss not to point out what I think is a contradiction in Murakami's position. On the one hand, he identifies "inner salvation for individuals" as "the social function of religion in a capitalist society" (p. 146). On the other, he calls for religious people to "protect the freedom of religion" and express "public criticism" of religious bodies that seek a cozy relationship with the state and serve its "reactionary purposes" (p. 167). As I see it, the more religious people involve themselves for religious reasons in protecting the principle of separation of religion and state, the less can it be said that the social function of religion is limited to "inner salvation for individuals." The relationship between religion and politics, not least in Japanese cultural perspective, probably has to be conceived more dialectically.

As for the translation, it is, on the whole, very good. Murakami's Japanese is difficult to translate, and the punch of the original is hard to capture in an alien tongue. The result is that the English is often more bland than the original. Color and bite get dissipated. For the most part, though, Earhart has turned out a very creditable English rendition, some sections of which flow so smoothly that (the ultimate in praise) one forgets it is a translation.

The labor involved in checking out or coining English names for the many organizations, government offices, and the like staggers the imagination. Inevitably, there are a few errors. On p. xvi, for example, the phrase "Shrine Shintō lasted a mere 70 years" should read "State Shintō. . ." On p. 102 the term "Church of Christ in Japan" should be replaced by the organization's standard English designation, "United Church of Christ in Japan" (the term used on pp. 161-162). "This-

worldly” comes out surprisingly often as “this-wordly” (pp. 12, 13, 149) or “this-worldly” (p. 49); the closing quotation marks have dropped out of the citation on p. 20 [they should be inserted after the word “them”]; and there is a rare but occasional example of a sentence that is grammatically incomplete (pp. 111, 135). In view of the fact that English usage regarding Japanese names is still not standardized, it would have been useful to include a prefatory or footnote statement to the effect that Japanese names are given in Japanese order. Also, the term *tsubo*, presented without explanation on p. 97, will doubtless disconcert people unfamiliar with that unit of measurement (about 36 sq. ft. or 3.3 sq. meters). Other matters could be mentioned, but enough has been indicated to show why I wish that the manuscript had been given one more careful editorial combing and an equally careful proof reading.

The English book is in some ways even better than the Japanese. For one thing, the translator has supplied a number of footnotes to explain terms that non-Japanese readers might fail to understand. Second, though the English has fewer photographs than the original, it also has some that did not appear there, and all the photographs are printed on glossy paper, thus showing details much more clearly than those of the original. Third, the author’s 69-title list of references (all in Japanese) has been replaced by a translator-compiled “Selected Bibliography” of 74 titles (all in English). Fourth, the usefulness of the book has been greatly enhanced by the addition of an 8-page index. Finally, the English version contains an entirely new chapter, “Religion in Japan today,” covering developments since the 1968 appearance of the original.

All in all, this work is, as the translator says, “a welcome addition to Western publications on modern Japanese history and religion” (p. xiv). Though published for popular consumption in Japan, it will doubtless serve as a reference work for many English readers. It is a book to be read with eyes wide open — but by all means to be read.

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