

## Review

Johannes Laube, *Oyagami: Die heutige Gottesvorstellung der Tenrikyō* (Studien zur Japanologie, Band 14). Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1979. xiii + 322 pp. DM.48.

Along with the growth of cultural change which characterizes our present age, the scientific interests of scholars are constantly widening. As a result, the objects of research become increasingly diverse and are studied more and more in detail. The publisher of the present volume specializes in Asian studies and this book itself belongs to the category of such very specialized works. It deals with Tenrikyō and treats in particular the idea of God in this still very young religion.

The author's first contact with Tenrikyō dates from 1971, when he became a teacher of German at Tenri University. He lived for three years in the city and was able to observe by himself the actual condition of Tenrikyō thought and beliefs. Originally a student of Christian theology and of religion in general, Johannes Laube's scientific interest was aroused very strongly by this first-hand experience. Since he intended to do research on Japanese religious ideas in the 19th and 20th centuries, he was naturally attracted by the thought of the foundress of Tenrikyō. This was the reason why, during his stay in Japan, he pursued his studies of Tenrikyō together with a study of the religious philosophy of Tanabe Hajime. I knew Laube during that period and remember how he decided upon "A Study of the Concept of God in Tenrikyō" as the title for his thesis and how he energetically began his scientific work. Every time I met him, I was impressed by the ability with which he could digest Japanese materials, and I expected then also very much from his research. The present volume is the fruit of these endeavors.

A general outline of the contents of Laube's work is as follows. In the Preface, he defines the problem and offers a presentation of and comments on the vast existing literature about Tenrikyō. Regardless of whether these works were written from the viewpoint of faith or from the standpoint of critical outsiders, Laube takes up all the most important studies in both Japanese and foreign languages. It is interesting how he especially refers to criticisms of Tenrikyō and adds his own critique to these. He continues then with a general

presentation of Tenrikyō religion. After describing the religious situation in Japan at the end of the Edo period and the beginning of the Meiji era, he dwells on the life of Tenrikyō's foundress and on the history of the Church. He then comments on the three sacred writings of Tenrikyō and gives an explanation of how, on the basis of these writings, the doctrinal system of the religion was built up. He makes a distinction from a historical viewpoint between the Meiji doctrine and the present one, which he calls the Shōwa doctrine. In explaining how they came into being, he refers particularly to the reasons which form the basis for the present doctrine.

The main part of Laube's book deals with the concept of *oyagami* and how it constitutes the very foundation of what Tenrikyō asserts today. While he argues from the standpoint of the systematic study of religion, he uses the official doctrine of the Church (published in English as *The Doctrine of Tenrikyō*) as the main springboard for his observations and divides them into three chapters.

In the first chapter, "*Oyasama* (God the Parent on earth)," he takes up the doctrinal position of the foundress, exemplified by expressions such as *moto no oya* ("the original Parent"), *zonmei no oya* ("the Parent, eternally living here"), *tsukihi no yashiro* ("the shrine of the moon-sun god"), *hinagata no oya* ("the exemplary Parent"), and others. He also questions whether the foundress (*oyasama*) was a human being, a god, or both, and her role as mediator.

In the second chapter, "*Oyagami* (God the Parent in heaven)," Laube deals with the existence of God as creator, protector, and savior. Again he explores several terms used in Tenrikyō to designate the idea of God, such as *ten* ("heaven"), *tenchi* ("heaven-earth"), *kami* ("god"), *tsukihi* ("moon-sun god"), *oya* ("parent"), *Tenri-ō-no-mikoto* ("Lord of divine wisdom"), and others.

In chapter three, the relationship between God and man is described in terms of a "parent-child" relationship as explained in the official doctrine of the Church. This is followed by a comparison with the relationship between God and man in Christianity. In this connection Laube uses as points of reference the God-man relationship in the ancient Mediterranean world, in Old Testament Judaism, and in New Testament Christian thought. While, for example, in Christianity only those who receive baptism in the name of Jesus Christ are called children of God, in Tenrikyō all human beings are called so by birth;

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and while in Christianity the word "Father" used by Jesus designates in most cases Jesus' personal relationship to God, in Tenrikyō the foundress Nakayama Miki stands completely on the side of God and often speaks to the people using the words, "I, your Parent."

Finally, Laube examines the theories of three Tenrikyō theologians and characterizes them, respectively, as cosmic-mythological theology, philosophical-dialectic theology, and personalistic theology.

The Appendix contains a German translation of the so-called Meiji and Shōwa doctrines, accompanied by a quite thorough scientific commentary on them. This part alone constitutes almost half of the whole volume. This translation is no doubt a basic undertaking in the process of research and can in fact only be done after having acquired a deep understanding of the doctrines. In this sense, it is of great value. The degree to which the author has been able to fully understand these Japanese-language materials proves his capacity as a scholar of Japanese culture in general. Also his commentary shows the accuracy of his observations and possesses a high scientific value. As for the translation, I could point out, for example, how Laube (in the case of the Shōwa doctrine) retains the Japanese word *oyasama* where the literal translation of "foundress" might have been expected. Although this is also the way that from the viewpoint of faith Tenrikyō people themselves express the term when translating, it is not the general usage and reveals therefore the considerate attention of the author toward *The Doctrine of Tenrikyō*. I would call it equally a scientific discernment. Indeed, we can see here how Laube knows how to combine scientific objectivity as a scholar of religion with a deep understanding of the world of faith as it exists in Tenrikyō. And another reason why his study is so reliable is the fact that, together with assimilating and accurately evaluating secondary sources, he also goes back to the primary sources to build up his argument.

Throughout the whole of this book, the author's scientific views show up little by little here and there in connection with his explanation of problematic points. However, as there is no specific place where he summarizes and discusses these views thoroughly, their impact on his overall argument sometimes loses some of its power.

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