

James M. PHILLIPS, *From the rising of the sun: Christians and society in contemporary Japan*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1981. 307 pp. \$14.95.

AS REGULAR AS the tides, wave after wave of books on the rise of postwar Japan and its role as a world culture flows out of the Japanese publishing houses and washes through the country's bookstores. Never before has the Japanese intelligentsia been so anxious to assert itself in comparison with the West on everything from economics, business, politics, and social movements to technology, science, literature, philosophy, and religion. Along with this has come a steady stream of material promoting awareness of the uniqueness of the Japanese character, which the public seems to soak up as fast as it can come out.

Oddly enough, Japanese Christianity would appear to be an exception. In spite of the fact that institutionally the Christian Churches in Japanese society, a longstanding symbol of the encounter with the West, have experienced remarkable developments of their own over the past generation and are themselves facing the challenge of defining their international identity, there has been a conspicuous lack of book-length attempts to chronicle the progress of events. Indeed, to my knowledge there has been nothing at all in this line to come out over the last ten years, either in Japanese or in English. James Phillips, a veteran Church worker of some seventeen years in Japan and a professor of Church history, has stepped into this vacuum boldly and impressively with his recent work, *From the rising of the sun*. No one interested in the contemporary history of Japanese Christianity can fail to appreciate the importance of his wide-reaching and well-documented research and the range of issues it raises for the future.

The structure of the book is simple and efficient. Phillips describes in an opening chapter what he sees as the three major periods of postwar Japan: the time of occupation (1945-1952), the time of rapid economic growth (1952-

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1968), and the time of challenge and reappraisal (1968-). He singles out 1968 as a watershed because of the outbreak of student unrest which affected the Christian Churches deeply, given their considerable involvement in higher education, and forced them into a serious reflection on their work in Japanese society. While other segments of society quickly recovered from that shock only to be faced with new crises in the economic and political arenas, the Churches, he argues, experienced a polarization and upheaval that they have yet fully to recover from.

Phillips then uses that tripartite grid to examine various aspects of the Christian presence in Japan in separate chapters: politics, education, social work, the outreach of the Churches, foreign missionaries, ecumenicity, biblical studies, and theology. One after the other each of these aspects is made to deliver of its developments through those three periods, thus giving the author a classifying model into which to pour the mass of information he has gathered from reading, travel, conversations, and personal experience. After a brief epilogue there follows a helpful concluding chapter of bibliographical information which should prove a blessing both for individuals who wish to follow up in detail some particular facet of Japanese Christianity and for libraries who wish to stack the major source material on the subject.

WITH SOME reservations, one may say that on the whole the historical model Phillips has adopted works best in the early chapters, begins to get less useful around the middle of the book, and is virtually abandoned in the final chapters. As one might expect, it means a fair amount of repetition of historical background as the text rolls through the same model again and again, and the task of correlating the various pieces into a unified whole is largely left to the reader. The alternative would have been to divide the work into three sections corresponding to the three periods, which would appear to be better as historical method and at some future date will surely need to be done. Mean-

time the sense of "compartmentalization" we are given has to be acknowledged as a reality in the Japanese Churches where the cross-fertilization of theology and social work, pastoral activity and ecumenicity, education and politics, and so forth has only just begun.

A further difficulty with the model Phillips has chosen is that he is led to overlook the possibility that different aspects of Christianity may have experienced their own landmarks and turning points. We are told, for example, that "by the use of a historical approach to the subject of ecumenicity, it becomes possible to discern three major periods through which Christians in Japan have passed since 1945" (p.177), but in fact it is just the other way around. The periods are not discerned but predetermined, and fit rather clumsily when one gets down to the actual facts of the story.

There are other biases that creep into the author's handling of the material more subtly though perhaps excusably. First of all, the history of Japanese Christianity is presumed to be centered in Tokyo. In the end the reader is unconvinced that the author's claim to have gathered his data from all four major islands of Japan makes a great deal of difference. Those familiar with developments in other areas can hardly deny the overwhelming influence of events in Tokyo, but the recent interest among Japanese historians for regional studies has seriously challenged the assumption that one can generalize about Japan from the center of its political and economic world.

Secondly, his information about Roman Catholicism is often wanting and occasionally mistaken. He does not seem to understand relationships between religious orders and bishops; he seems to assume that Catholic philosophy and theology are only interested in scholasticism, and in that regard makes the odd remark that Father Heinrich Dumoulin's academic career is notable for his contribution to the "updating of Thomism" (p.264); he ignores the work of Catholic academics outside of Tokyo's Sophia University; he fails to mention the really unique situation of the Catholic

Church in Nagasaki.

Thirdly, he is on rather weak footings and unfamiliar with the relevant literature when he speaks of the interreligious dialogue in Japan, both from the Christian side and from that of other religions who have made approaches to Christianity. Here we might mention the telltale but unfortunate exaggeration of claiming that Hatano's *Time and eternity* "is probably the leading Japanese work in the philosophy of religion" (p.215), a passing reference to the *Japanese journal of religious studies* by a name that it changed over ten years ago (p.293), and the omission of mention of the several organizations formed explicitly for interfaith encounter and research.

The choice of method and the operational biases combine to give the impression that, notwithstanding the author's explicit hope that his work will "commend itself to Christians of all communions, to people of other faiths and of no faith" (p.ix), the book is basically aimed at his Protestant colleagues in Tokyo. That is not to say that his hope has been in vain, but only that one feels throughout that it is a book written from one standpoint within Christianity and restricted to the critical demands of that standpoint. Facts and opinions are documented from interviews with individuals whom many Christian readers, even within Japan, would not know. The Kyōdan (United Church of Christ in Japan) is spoken of from the first pages and appears again and again, but it is not until page 148 that we are given some hint of its organization, and not until page 179 that he starts to describe exactly how it is composed. Such slips could have been avoided had he kept that hope more clearly before his mind's eye.

Furthermore, in deference to the religious interests of a wider audience, he might have given at least a passing glance to the vast amount of sociological research that has been done on Japanese religions, including Christianity, by the academic world of Japan. The few statistics provided in the chapter on education stand out as an exception and make us wish that more such information had been provided

rather than assumed, and commented on. Western studies on missiology are so often in error about the sociological structure and size of Japanese Christianity that a real service could have been performed here.

Or again, the faint outline of the author's friends and colleagues seems to stand in the shadows when he pauses to pass judgment on the progress of events in the Churches. His clear preference for smooth and reasonable change without division and a minimum of conflict can only appear uncritical to those of other persuasions and other countries. It may be possible to get away with the idea in certain circles of Japanese Protestantism that the charismatic movement and liberation theology are basically forms of the same model of Christian mission in that both look beyond the historical process for salvation (p.134), but that is hardly a fair picture of Japanese Christianity to paint to the rest of Asia and the West.

It may be possible, too, to get away with the idea in Japan that the experiences of Christianity in contemporary Japan are "in some sense a microcosm of those of Christianity around the world during these years" (p.284), but surely they are no more than a partial reflection of the changes that are taking place in the rest of Asia, let alone Africa, South America, Europe, and the United States. His colleagues may warm to the idea that Japan's Christians have as their task to steer Japan on a middle course, avoiding rightist and leftist tendencies "in the hopes of guiding their rapidly moving society on a course heading towards progress and not to destruction" (p.47), but the majority of readers will be skeptical about the restrictions that size and influence impose on Christianity in Japanese society as a whole.

FINALLY, I cannot restrain myself from stating my disappointment that the whole manuscript was not better edited. The margins of my copy are full of question marks about overstatements (the claim on p.166 that the government requires of anyone to be classified as a missionary that

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one's "entire financial support originate outside Japan" is simply incorrect); grammatical mixups (on p.203 in the chapter on ecumenicity he writes that "if one wants to deal more with problems, with social analysis, or with the psychology of mass movements, it all depends on which partners one chooses for the interfaith dialogue"); unclari- ties (speaking of the difficulties of ecumenical efforts after the war he notes that "there seemed to be very little energy left over to consider the needs of other groups for which one had never assumed the traditional burdens of obligation," which could be corrected in a half dozen different ways to make sense out of it); wooliness in expression (on p.168 one of his sources is made to say that "from the 1880s down to the 1970s' Security Treaty crises and perhaps later, the degree of acceptance or rejection of Christianity in Japan is related to the degree of accep- tance or rejection of 'American culture,'" though it is not until p.188 that the author himself qualifies this to mean that the rise in membership of the Churches was closely related to the state of government relations between Japan and the United States); misplaced metaphors (on p.158 he misses the point of Plato's metaphor of the cave and of how cogs work in machines, and on p.176 his explanation of the *yajirobē* is altogether unclear); misuse of words (Tokyo's Kichijōji Church is cited on p.163 as an example of Catholic **urban** ministry, while on p.129 he locates it in a **suburban** setting); prepositional tangles (on p.184, "to appeal to extraterritorial privileges or for the protection of..." and on p.187, "unconcern or perhaps approval toward"); and so on.

Orbis Books may be excused, I suppose, for the handful of misprints in the romanization of Japanese words, but surely their authors and their reading public deserve more attention to the editing.

Those technical matters aside, if there are things to fault in *From the rising of the sun* as a piece of historical work it is only because it is such an ambitious work with- out any clear precedent to lean on. If it stumbles over its

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own feet at times and walks around questions one might have wished to see treated, it is still an important and sensitive study, and one that does honor to the ten years of work that went into its composition. James Phillips has done Japanese Christianity a good deed.

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