

Japan Denominational Statistics 1996

1995 Statistics for the Largest Japanese Denominations

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DENOMINATION	MEMBERSHIP	CHANGE	CONGREGATIONS	CLERGY/ RELIGIOUS
Roman Catholic	437,600	(0)	1,069	9,901
United Church of Christ in Japan (<i>Kyōdan</i>)	205,258	-2,432	1,721	2,181
<i>Nippon Seikōkai</i> (Anglican)	57,407	-257	318	343
Japan Baptist Convention	31,854	+313	325	460
Eastern Orthodox	25,611	(0)	84	64
Japan Evangelical Lutheran	22,264	-108	152	166
Church of Christ Japan (<i>Nikki</i>)	13,450	+648	142	161
Seventh Day Adventists	13,694	+137	160	136
Immanuel (Wesleyan)	12,637	+67	120	275
Jesus Christ Church	12,456	(0)	127	263
<i>Kyōdaidan</i>	3,660	-6	76	162
Holiness Church	12,655	+300	160	370
Assemblies of God	11,413	+336	187	360
Reformed Church in Japan	8,945	+2	127	152
The Evangelical Alliance (<i>Dōmei</i>)	8,839	(0)	175	304
Japan Evangelical Christian Church Associaton	6,752	-1,277	172	169
Salvation Army	5,671	-656	68	213
Holy Church of Jesus	6,894	+143	102	226
Church of the Nazarene	6,119	-130	78	90
Japan Baptist Union	4,828	-2	75	103
Independent Churches (<i>Renmei</i>)	30,413	+200	861	(N/A)
Korean Christian Church in Japan	6,262	(0)	82	81

NOTES AND COMMENTS

IN SOME WAYS it seems too early to look back on 1995 and the impact it has had on the religious life of Japan. Statistically the first half of the 1990s have seen slow but steady growth in the membership of the larger Christian community, but not all of the

mainline churches are sharing in this same growth. Some 4,897 have disappeared from the rolls of the *Kyōdan*, *Nikki*, the Anglican Church, the Baptists, and the Japan Evangelical Church Association in the past year alone. In contrast such Christian-based New Religions such as the Mormons, the Jehovah

the application of the constitutionally dubious *Habohō* (The Anti-Subversive Activities Act). Consequently all activities of Christian groups will need to be marked by a greater openness and transparency.

The fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II and of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki may ultimately be looked back on as lost opportunities, particularly for the government and the general population, since leadership was not shown when it mattered by the former. No further explanations or interpretations can cast in a better light the Diet resolution to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war than recalling how many members were absent and the days of haggling that went into the wording of the resolution. Indeed a full complement of Diet members consenting to a resolution that only contains the word *hansei* (reflection/reconsider) will never replace just one government minister or major party leader with the courage to use the word *shazai* (apology, regret). One wonders how many of them were aware of how pale and lifeless their words sounded in comparison with the clarity, compassion and courage that echoed from the words of Dr. Richard von Weizsacker, former President of West Germany, who was in Japan on a speaking tour during August of last year. Unless one's perspective on World War II, which ever side one fought on or is linked to by culture and historical memory, takes in both Auschwitz and Dresden, Pearl Harbor and Hiroshima-Nagasaki, the bomb-sights of Enola Gay or Box Car at 30,000 feet and "ground zero" near the Trade Promotion Hall or Urakami Cathedral, then probably no real healing or reconciliation will ever be achieved but rather there will always remain a cloud of suspicion that the winds of time cannot blow away.

The *Kirisutokyō Nenkan 1996* contains nearly a dozen statements by various churches and other representative groups to

mark the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war. Some were translated into English, but most received little attention from the national secular press. The Catholic Church produced two, first from the Bishops' Conference (February 15) and then from the Justice and Peace Commission (April 16); one had a painful birthing, while the other showed what happens when Gospel values are given priority. Sadly, no educational institutions seem to have followed the lead of Meiji Gakuin University though none that trace their history to the prewar period can look back on totally unstained records of those days. One hopes that no Christian group or individual will presume that we are now done with learning the necessary lessons of World War II, but rather accept the painful reality of how few are the seeds of a genuine Christian vision of peace that have been sown or taken root in the soil of Japan.

As plans for the *Kokuritsu Senbotsusha Suito Heiwa Kinen Kaikan* near Yasukuni Jinja, (Kudan, Tokyo) still move relentlessly ahead, and so create one more site of pilgrimage for the nationalist right, one applauds the courage of the people of Okinawa symbolized in their memorial to all the war dead of those islands. All are listed on the silent, serried ranks of stone that line the hillside, just outside Itoman-shi, as a beacon of hope overlooking the Pacific Ocean. They are named neither as friend or foe, combatant or civilian, nor are distinctions made for reasons of race, creed or color. We are hallowed by lives that first were hallowed in history and now are hallowed in stone. War is the work of man (and here the word is apropos), while Peace is the gift of the Heavenly Father who is indiscriminate and prodigal in his love. The urgency of the tasks that face those who have accepted the challenge to give witness to the Crucified and Risen One do not fade or dim, and we are grateful for every new light of hope such as that which has been lit at Itoman.

show, before it metamorphosed into the Aum Shinrikyō, many of its early members, including probably Matsumoto Chizuo (Asahara Shoko) himself, were honest seekers after the truth. But at some stage (certainly before the defeat of Shinri party candidates in the elections) there was a shift in the focus of the sect's teaching as Matsumoto became Asahara Shoko. The attempt to integrate the language of Christian apocalyptic (e. g., "Armageddon," to which he gave his own idiosyncratic interpretation) into elements of esoteric Buddhism meant a quantum leap. (Further detail is available in Shimazono Susumu's article in the Fall-Winter 1995 issue of the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*.) In creating a doctrinal maze, many of the media commentators, lacking an adequate set of interpretative tools, opted for convenient labels such as "cult" to describe it, and only succeeded in muddying the waters more.

Nor was there any substantial critique by Christian theologians. Ironically the keynote speaker at a meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of Japan, held in the autumn of 1995, was Professor Shimazono Susumu from the Religious Studies Department at Tokyo University, one of the more perceptive commentators. The tools are there in contemporary American theology if only one is prepared to look. For example, though normally applied to Christianity and Christians, one feels that some help may have been found in the relationship discerned by writers such as James Fowler (*Stages of Faith*, 1981) between human/personal development and faith/spiritual development. Unhappily, such writing and the ideas proposed there do not seem to be part of the common currency of theological discourse in Japan, where one notes, at least in some Catholic circles, a tendency rather towards what could be called "creedal archaeology."

References to Aum Shinrikyō, or indeed Agonshū to which Matsumoto/Asahara was

briefly linked, are very sparse in scholarly journals before the events of March 20, 1995. Rather, along with Kofuku no Kagaku, it became a media event, a social phenomenon that was observed with the limited tools of the *Uido Shou* (Wide Show), Japan's own unique contribution to the world of "tabloid television." Such shows demand "faces" who can offer sound-bites, and found them in the two key spokespersons of Aum, Joyu Takehiro and Aoyama Yoshinobu. The latter was a lawyer who passed the Japanese bar exam in his third year at university before gaining any real experience of the world. The former was able to turn to his advantage the Japanese "romance" with English by skillfully using not particularly sophisticated debating skills (e.g., ignoring the question that has been put to one), and the ability to string together half a dozen or more badly pronounced English words into a smoke screen that hid his consistent economy with the truth.

Within the companion piece to this survey of denominational statistics, ("The Christian Year in Review, 1995"), the item for April 18 mentions opposition to moves to amend the law on religious corporations. Moves towards tabling amendments to the same law were already afoot when the deadly poisonous gas "sarin" was released in the Tokyo subway system on March 20. At that time, though never openly admitted, another even more politically influential religious group was the target. As talks on the shape and form of the amendments moved apace all religious groups felt that their future freedom of activity was under threat. Now following Aum's emergence on the national stage much religious activity may find itself being viewed with a higher degree of apprehension than before, and the law enforcement forces may not be so reluctant to move against any group whose activities seem to involve dubious practices. Even more so following the opening of proceedings against Aum Shinrikyō that are based on

the application of the constitutionally dubious *Habohō* (The Anti-Subversive Activities Act). Consequently all activities of Christian groups will need to be marked by a greater openness and transparency.

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