

by Louis Allen

Just over a year ago, a sample copy of an English course textbook, *New Junior Crown (for third graders)* by William C. Clark, was submitted to the Mombusho (Ministry of Education) in Tokyo for approval. To obtain teachers' reactions to the course, the Ministry sent out a hundred copies of *New Junior Crown* and asked for their views. A group of left-wing teachers, the New English Research Association, found a number of things in the book tendentious and inaccurate, not from the point of view of English idiom or grammar, but from what was purveyed to the pupil as 'the Japanese way of life'. Each lesson showed an American family, the Browns, on a tour of Japan, and in Lesson Eleven they were taken to 'The Grand Shrine at Ise'. The New English Research Association had already pointed out that Mr Clark seemed intent, in other lessons, on glorifying the Emperor-system and over-simplifying religious issues; but in Lesson Eleven he had really gone beyond the mark. After tipping a Shinto priest two thousand yen, the Browns were invited into the shrine, where some dances were performed for their benefit. 'Now let's go to the Inner Shrine', the lesson went on, 'it's the most sacred place in Japan. I want it remembered as the high point of your trip. . . . A thick white curtain was in the entrance. The Browns stood reverently before the curtain. How peaceful everything was. They prayed for peace in the world. Suddenly the curtain began to rise. It went higher and higher. Soon it was over the Browns' heads. It was like a hand lifted in blessing. . . .' The New English Research Association found the tipping odd, and the miraculous movement of the curtain out of place in what purported to be a book teaching third grade English, and, curiously enough, the book's publishers, the very well-known firm of Sanseido, thought likewise.

'We too questioned some parts especially about Mr Brown giving money to see the dances. But the textbook was like a pyramid. If you pulled one stone out, the whole thing would have turned into a mess. So we left the text as it was when we submitted it to the Mombusho for approval. Frankly, we were more afraid of reaction from Shinto priests and right-wingers than from the teachers.' The Mombusho itself was so impressed by the criticisms of the course that, doubtless acting on a Ministry hint, Sanseido have removed the offending

¹Joseph M. Kitagawa, *Religion in Japanese History*, Columbia University Press, New York and London, 1966, pp. x × 475, \$10.

Jean Herbert, *Dieux et sectes populaires du Japon*, Albin-Michel, Paris, 1967, pp. 284, Frs. 25.

esson and substituted a visit to the cultured pearls at Ago Bay, and any other traces of too highly flavoured Emperor worship and glorification of Shinto have been removed.

The episode is interesting, because it shows not only that Europeans and Americans resident in Japan can easily become so uncritically Japanophile that they end up by being *Nipponiores ipsis Nipponis*, but that there are large and influential bodies of Japanese who are still sensitive to the possible threats to a hard-won democracy represented by any resurgence in the attention paid to Shinto shrines and what happens there.

What *does* happen there? On the face of it, very little. Marriages, respect paid to the dead, the celebration of certain seasonal festivals. And in the very simplicity and naturalness of the surroundings of the *ise* shrine, such a profoundly mystical Catholic as Louis Massignon was able to feel the presence of the numinous. Lafcadio Hearn, too—that most distinguished of Ushaw's literary *alumni*—described in Shinto 'that intimate sense of relation between the visible and invisible worlds which is the special religious characteristic of Japan among all civilized countries'. Yet of all the world's great religions, Shinto is today the least understood in the West, and the most maligned.

There are good reasons for this, of course. Shinto was for close on a century misused by Japanese militarism just as Buddhism had been used under the Tokugawa shogunate to police the nation by enforcing compulsory temple-membership and registration. But the misuse of a religion by the secular arm is no new thing, by no means confined to the East, and even though, as seems not improbable, a growing rationalism in present-day Japan will focus on such shrines as the Yasukuni Jinja where the ashes of dead warriors are preserved for national veneration, pure Shinto is not essentially militaristic at all, but consists, as Professor Kitagawa points out, of gratitude towards the *kami* (deities), fear of evil *kami*, and purification from physical and mental (but not moral) defilement. When the Japanese employ the term *kami*, as for instance applied to the Emperor, there is no sense of describing a one, eternal, omnipotent creator of the universe. *Kami* implies simply a belief in the sacredness of the universe: 'no tree could be marked for felling, no bush tapped for lacquer juice, no oven built for smelting or pottery, and no forge fire lit without appeal to the *kami* residing in each' (Langdon Warner, *The Enduring Art of Japan*, pp. 18-19; in Kitagawa, p. 12). There are also the 'national *kami*', originally the deities of the Imperial clan, developed in some detail in the early Japanese mythologies such as the *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki* but remote from the lives of the common people, and derived from ideas peculiar to the ruling class: the charisma of the imperial office derived from the emperor's quasi-shamanistic role as the channel of expression of the divine word of command to the nation, communicated through dreams and the ecstasy known as

kami-possession, 'induced by the playing of the *koto* and other musical instruments' (Kitagawa, p. 18).

The particular value of Professor Kitagawa's book is that it studies the growth of Shinto, and later of Buddhism and Japanese Christianity, in terms of the historical development of Japanese society rather than as a theoretical structure of beliefs and rites. He shows quite interestingly that Shinto, which began without any particular ecclesiastical organization, acquired (in the sixth to eighth centuries of the Christian era) a privileged class or 'clergy', centred round a given liturgical community with its own particular *kami* and its own social entity, the clan (*uji*). 'The sociological unit of the clan was in effect the basic unit of religious solidarity', he writes, 'so that clansmen maintained an exclusive relationship with their own *kami*' (p. 31). Which is precisely what one would expect: but there was a further development in that when Buddhism was introduced, it slipped into the same clan-pattern, so that Buddhist temples came to be regarded as *uji-dera* (temples of the clan).

Such a system led, quite easily, to a state of things in which the government controlled 'clerical' status and jurisdiction, functioning, in relation to Buddhism, as a religious police. In fact, once it became clear that religion would be at the service of the state, the latter did not discriminate unduly between cults: Shinto, Buddhism, Confucianism could celebrate their festivals side by side, and later Shinto and Buddhism evolved a pattern of coexistence (usually called Ryobu Shinto), in which the Shinto *kami* came to be admitted as manifestations of Buddhas and bodhisattvas in Japanese guise. This phenomenon goes back at least to the eighth century, and is still characteristic of Japan today, as recent statistics published by the Ministry of Education show. In 1966 the national membership for Shinto was registered as 79,504,000; for Buddhism, 78,773,000. But the entire population of Japan in that year was only 99,060,000, so several million people clearly registered themselves as belonging indifferently to both religions.

Jean Herbert's book shows that this syncretism is a particular feature of the *shinkō shūkyō* (new religions) in post-war Japan. Herbert, who is an authority on Hindu spirituality, has made a detailed study of Shinto in two previous volumes, *Aux Sources du Japon* and *Les Dieux Nationaux du Japon*, and the present book *Dieux et sectes populaires du Japon* complements Kitagawa's book very handily by eschewing the historical approach and giving detailed analyses of popular beliefs in the various *kami* which constitute the original animist Pantheon of Shinto, *kami* of sea and water, of roads, houses and fields, of families and corporations. Like Kitagawa, he has used not merely western-language sources but Japanese documents and interviews with Japanese Shinto and Buddhist priests, a fact which imparts a particular value to his treatment of the new sects. The importance of at least one of these, Sōka Gakkai, which is a form of the very intolerant

and martial Nichiren Buddhism, has been recognized recently in the West; and indeed its intervention in politics with its own party, the Kōmeitō or 'clean government party', which has just increased its number of seats in the recent Upper House elections, makes it a phenomenon worthy of study. But of the Shinto-based sects, it is 'the religion of divine wisdom' (Tenrikyō) which claims attention.

It was founded by a peasant woman, Miki Nakayama (1798-1887), who had wished to become a Buddhist nun but was married at the age of 13 and had had six children by the time she was forty. Her religious allegiance seems to have been to the Pure Land (Jodo) sect of Buddhism, but she also indulged in Shinto spiritual practices and in 1838 declared she had been possessed by a *kami*, Ten no Shōgun ('the heavenly general'), who proclaimed through her that he was 'the true original God, predestined to take up his dwelling' in her. 'I have come down from Heaven to save mankind', he proclaimed, 'I shall make Miki the Temple of God.' After her husband's death in 1863 she sent her daughter Kokan, then aged 16, out to Osaka to preach her message, and to work miracles such as curing madness and bringing about painless childbirth. Both civil authorities and Buddhist clergy persecuted her, and she spent several years in prison. She died at the age of 90 leaving behind two works, the *Ofudesaki* ('The Tip of the Brush') and the *Mikagure-uta* ('Songs for Religious Dances'), in the first of which she proclaimed that the mouth which spoke was human but the spirit speaking within was divine. Buddha and Christ had both brought 'indirect salvation' to the world, but now Miki Nakayama was the first to bring 'direct and complete' salvation.

Her sect was officially recognized in 1888, and her descendants preside over its destinies at the moment, continuing the sacred prayers and dances (*tsutome*) which are supposed to give the members of the sect control over the external world. The sect itself has its own town, Tenri, for headquarters, and proselytizes strongly, sending its missionaries not only throughout Japan, but to the U.S., Canada, Hawaii and the Philippines. It claims roughly two and a half million adherents, owns 15,000 temples and has a 'clergy' of 100,000 evangelists, half of them women, and has even given rise to new sects within itself.

As Professor Kitagawa points out, the strongly charismatic nature of the founder, the simple teachings recalling the early mythologies, the messianic promises of healing, prosperity and individual happiness, were bound to appeal to the oppressed elements in Japanese society, and Tenrikyō's founder did not hesitate to criticize Japan's government and ruling classes which were, in her view, 'aligned with foreign capital and . . . unconscious puppets of foreign countries'. But it was not long before governmental pressure made itself felt and forced Tenrikyō to reconcile its deity with the traditional Shinto

kami, to coincide with the emperor cult, and the development of nationalism.

A similar metamorphosis overtook another of the new religions, Omoto-kyō ('religion of the great fundamentals') which was likewise based on divine oracles delivered by the shamanistic peasant woman Nao Deguchi (1836-1918) who believed herself to be *kami*-possessed and endowed with powers of healing. The divine mystery of the world, she proclaimed, had been obscured by the selfishness of the privileged classes, and mankind was awaiting the complete purification as a result of which 'the Great World shall be changed into the Kingdom of Heaven where Peace reigns through all eternity'. Her son-in-law, Onisaburo Deguchi, who systematized her teaching, was even more specific: 'Armaments and war', he declared, 'are the means by which landlords and capitalists make their profit, while the poor must suffer. There is nothing more harmful than war and nothing more foolish than armament.' Such success did this teaching have, not only among peasants but even among civil servants and army officers, that Deguchi was arrested in 1921 and the centre of the Omoto-kyō in Ayabe, near Kyoto, was destroyed.

This act might have provided the martyrs the religion needed to spread. Instead, when the Omotokyō began to proselytize in China, Manchuria and Mongolia, the Japanese army authorities decided it was wiser to back it and use it rather than to destroy it, and within a decade the movement's leaders were preaching jingoistic nationalism, organizing semi-military groups of young men and women, and running a nationalist movement called the *Shōwa-shinsei-kai* which found sponsors among the more sinister figures of Japan's secret societies, including Mitsuru Toyama. The new religions, in this way, continue the age-old patterns of Japanese religious life: the charismatic founder, the shamanistic rituals—dances and incantations—government intervention, and sooner or later an identification with a particular ruling ethos.

There have recently been a number of studies in French and English making *rapprochements* of various kinds between Christianity and Buddhism and Hinduism. The gulf between Christianity and Shinto, on the other hand, might seem unbridgeable. But is it? One of the most convinced Christians I have ever listened to, Toyohiko Kagawa, once wrote of this, 'I am inclined to believe that Christianity will go farther than it has in the past in adapting itself to Japanese forms of thought; that while it will demand belief in the one unique God as revealed by Christ, it will also encourage the honour of ancestors and the preservation of their tombs and memorials with scrupulous care, and that it will look with tolerance upon Japanese traditional customs which have been connected with their ethnic faiths'. He wrote this, admittedly, in 1934, when he was trying hard to square being a believing Christian with being a patriotic Japanese, at a time when Japanese patriotism and military adventure seemed

synonymous. But his instinct was right in one sense: if Christianity is to renew and extend its impact upon the Japanese, it will not be adequate for us to have some appreciation of Buddhist metaphysics and the art and poetry of Zen. The remoter, more difficult, but in many ways more fundamental notions of Shinto will have to be the subject of a long and patient Christian analysis. Professor Kitagawa and Jean Herbert have provided an excellent foundation for such a study.