

Kenneth J. Dale, *Circle of harmony*. Tokyo: Seibunsha, 1975. 211 pages including appendix, notes, and bibliography. No index. Paperback. ¥1,500 in Japan, \$4.95 in U.S.

Any visitor to Tokyo who has seen the imposing complex of buildings of Risshō Kōsei Kai and the great crowds milling about the area is usually prompted to ask, "What really goes on there?" Risshō Kōsei Kai, one of the significant contemporary Buddhist groups in Japan, has already been studied by various Japanese and Western students of Japanese religions. Dr. Dale's *Circle of harmony*, however, is a valuable addition to the literature, and gives the reader an unusual sense of immediacy as to what is going on in one key area of Risshō Kōsei Kai.

Dale, a longtime resident of Japan and professor of Practical Theology at the Japan Lutheran Theological College and Seminary in Tokyo, writes with a twofold purpose. The major portion of his study is an analysis of Risshō Kōsei Kai's basic teaching unit known as the *hōza*. This is a small discussion group led by a lay leader who teaches the doctrines of Risshō Kōsei Kai and instructs the members

of the group in the application of these teachings to their everyday problems. The concluding section of the book is addressed to the Christian churches of Japan. Dale makes some pointed criticisms of the churches' approach to Japanese people and suggests alternatives based on an understanding of the Japanese social structure derived from his study of Risshō Kōsei Kai.

The last chapter of the book is a paper by Dr. Akahoshi Susumu, Director of the Psychiatric Division of the Ogawa Red Cross Hospital near Tokyo. Employing concepts from the psychology of religion and developmental psychology, Dr. Akahoshi examines Western and Japanese "religiosity" and makes a brief analysis of Dale's data on the basis of his theory.

Dale, as a social scientist, in the first part of his book premises his study of Risshō Kōsei Kai on the sociological understanding of religion. Though he states that religion is more than a response to social developments, his study of Risshō Kōsei Kai is closely aligned to this stance. The procedure of his analysis is the case study method. In addition to immersing himself in the literature of Risshō Kōsei Kai and its interpreters, Dale attended forty *hōza* sessions over a period of one and a half years. Here he observed and participated in the discussions of the *hōza* and interviewed *hōza* leaders and other members of the Risshō Kōsei Kai hierarchy. It is this living contact with his subject that enables Dale to give the reader a rare and intimate insight into the personalities and dynamics of the *hōza*.

Risshō Kōsei Kai, rendered by the author as "The Society for the Establishment of Righteousness and Achievement of Fellowship," was founded in 1938 by two dissident members of Reiyūkai, a popular Buddhist-based religion of that time. Initially Risshō Kōsei Kai was greatly influenced by Shinto and folk religion elements, although officially the core of its teaching has always been the Lotus Sutra. The growth of Risshō Kōsei Kai is phenomenal. In 1941 its membership was listed as 1,000. A recent government survey places its membership as of 31 December 1970 near 5,000,000.

The hub of Risshō Kōsei Kai is located in Tokyo. Here a complex of schools, offices, and a hospital, all dominated by the immense Great Sacred Hall and the Fumon Hall, the latter built at a cost of more than twenty-eight million dollars, serves as the control center of all Risshō Kōsei Kai's varied activities. Today Risshō Kōsei Kai's doctrine is a combination of the familiar four noble truths and the

bodhisattva ideal of leading others to the truth as expressed in the Lotus Sutra. In addition, promises of concrete, this-worldly benefits which will accrue from belief in the doctrines of Risshō Kōsei Kai are given prominent place in the propagation and teaching materials. These doctrines are effectively conveyed to the members and seekers through services of worship, training sessions, sixteen huge yearly festivals, and many *hōza* meetings in Tokyo and other parts of the nation.

The official Risshō Kōsei Kai English translation of *hōza* is "group counseling." The term's fundamental meaning, however, is a combination of *hō* ("law") and *za* ("sitting") which implies sitting together to learn the law of Buddha. Thus for Risshō Kōsei Kai the *hōza* is the expression of the Buddhist principle of the Sangha, "the congregation of people closely united who have recourse to Sakyamuni Buddha and his teachings" (p. 32).

Dale's analysis of the *hōza* is based on five categories: physical environment, organization, leadership, socio-emotional dynamics, and conceptual content. In discussing each category Dale carefully distinguishes between his observations (which include general data and summaries of dialogues between *hōza* leaders and participants) and his interpretations of each of the categories. This division provides the reader with easy access to data to which he can apply at a later time his own criteria of analysis.

The *hōza* relates to the participant in two distinct ways. Dale's research shows that on the socio-emotional level the participant is given a sense of acceptance and assurance. The entire Risshō Kōsei Kai program and especially the *hōza* convey to the participant in familiar Japanese forms and attitudes the message that he is welcomed and will be accepted as a member of the group. Within the warmth of a desired acceptance pattern the participant is given the assurance that whatever his problem may be there is an acceptable solution. Since the majority of those who attend the *hōza* are from the urban lower middle class, the importance of these two factors is very evident. Their daily life is characterized by limited social mobility and lack of control over the economic and other social forces that affect their lives. The effectiveness of the *hōza* method on this level is graphically demonstrated by the great number of people who faithfully attend their *hōza* meetings. Dale's description of this aspect of the *hōza* is especially effective.

On the conceptual level the author discovered that Risshō Kōsei Kai is not a dispenser of a new doctrine, but a very effective propagator of traditional Japanese values and understandings. The *hōza* typifies the fundamental Japanese concept of the primacy of the group and the vertical structure of society. The charismatic and authoritarian character of the *hōza* leader and the content and form of the teaching and advice all reinforce these basic Japanese attitudes. Endurance of suffering, submission to superiors, and veneration of ancestors can undo the effects of bad karma and bring one to a state of harmony with his immediate group and all of society. The answer to almost every problem posed in the *hōza* follows this pattern, and the leader assures and admonishes the participant that if the achievement of harmony is one's goal, concrete material blessings will usually accompany this decision. Thus the *hōza* tends to promote and conserve Japanese values, and directs the participant to conform to the traditional pattern of society rather than to pursue new and creative solutions.

Dale concludes that on the emotional level the *hōza* is very successful in meeting the felt needs of the participants, not in the sense of Western values of counseling, but in the context of the demands of traditional Japanese culture. The direction of the teaching, however, diminishes the worth of the individual, permits the possibility of the rise of dictatorial leadership, and runs counter to the Japanese movement toward an international outlook and the formulation of free and democratic social institutions.

The concluding section should be required reading for Christian leaders. With obvious appreciation for the way Risshō Kōsei Kai has touched the man in the street, Dale contrasts the overly intellectual, cold, aloof character of many churches in Japan. The need to eliminate these characteristics is paramount, and Dale's thesis is: "increased understanding of the dynamics operative in the popular religious movements can help to stimulate this needed radical shake-up" (p. 169).

In his supplemental article Dr. Akahoshi states that all human religiosity is an act of the ego as it transfers its basic trust of mother's love to some object of "ultimate concern." The historical and cultural development of this for the Japanese is the *amae* type of group dependence, and for the Western world it is the self-reliant individualistic model. The manifestations of these characteristics in Risshō

Kōsei Kai and in Western forms of religion are noted, and Akahoshi proposes that an effort be made to rightly assess the strengths and weaknesses of each type in order to foster a "religiosity common to all the peoples of the world" (p. 186). Akahoshi concludes, however, that the Christian Gospel is and will remain a stumbling block to human religiosity since transference (to an illusion?) is an act of the ego, whereas faith is a gift of God's love in Christ which fulfills the longing of man's religiosity, transcends the act of transference, and actualizes personal fellowship between God and man.

Both Dale and Akahoshi treat their subject from the viewpoint of a specific discipline and from the perspective of their Christian commitment. Their professional competence in their respective fields is obvious, but there is also an evident tension between examining a religious phenomenon with reductionistically oriented concepts and examining it from the standpoint of a commitment to a transcendent referent. Both authors have made a notable contribution to the study of Japanese religions, yet at the same time have indirectly focused attention on the continuing problem of the elusive character of man's religion which constantly slips through the holes of our theoretical nets.

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