

Mark R. MULLINS, *Christianity Made in Japan: A Study of Indigenous Movements*. Nanzan Library of Asian Religion and Culture. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998. 288 pp. \$48.00 cloth, ISBN 0-8248-2114-9. \$24.95 paper, ISBN 0-8248-2132-7.

A GOOD BOOK, in my view, is one that provides new information about a worthy theme. A fine book is one that provides a new perspective from which to understand a significant body of information. A superb book is one that provides both new information about a worthy theme and a new, thought-provoking perspective from which to understand a significant body of information. This is a superb book.

Mark Mullins, professor of sociology of religion and Christian studies at Meiji Gakuin University in Tokyo, has devoted years of research to pursuing an answer to the question: "What happens to a world religion when it is transplanted from one culture to another?" More specifically, he focuses on "made in Japan" forms of Protestant Christianity—not its mainline forms but its indigenous movements. "My primary concern," he says, "has been to understand what Japanese Christians have done with Christianity, independent of the authority and control of the mission churches." Within the framework of the sociology of religion, he aims not to develop a general theory of indigenization but to determine: why some Japanese accepted Christianity but rejected its missionary carriers and traditions; what role was played by Japanese charismatic leaders in the shaping of indigenous Christianity; what new social forms were developed; how Japanese Christians in this stream understood their faith and its relation to "pre-Christian" religious traditions; and what new rituals were institutionalized in the indigenous Christian movements. And let it be said at once: he has done a magnificent job.

To summarize the content of a book inevitably entails selection and even trivialization, but a summary is called for nonetheless.

After one chapter defining the terms of the inquiry and another characterizing the social sources of Christianity in Japan, Mullins turns immediately to the subject of charismatic leadership. This subject is pivotal for his understanding of indigenous Christian movements because each movement of this kind owes its origin to a charismatic leader—and often faces difficulties when such a leader dies.

Nonchurch Christianity, founded by Uchimura Kanzō, is characterized as the "fountainhead" of the indigenous movements. Yet it was not the only one of its type. Two others, treated under the heading "Christianity as a path of self-cultivation," are The Way, founded by Matsumura Kaiseki in 1907, and Christ Heart Church, founded by Kawai Shinsui in 1927. After analyzing and

comparing these movements, Mullins discusses “Japanese versions of apostolic Christianity,” here treating the Spirit of Jesus Church, the Holy Ecclesia of Jesus, and the Original Gospel Movement.

Attention to “Japanese Christians and the world of the dead” permits Mullins not only to bring other indigenous movements into view but also to consider some of the ritual forms that charismatic leaders have rediscovered in the Bible, ritual forms by which they address the widespread Japanese concern for the fate of their ancestors. Movements discussed under this heading, in addition to those mentioned above, include some that will be unfamiliar to most readers: the Glorious Gospel Christian Church, Living Christ One Ear of Wheat Church, Christ Canaan Church, Japan Ecclesia of Christ, the Sanctifying Christ Church, the Life-Giving Christ, and the Okinawa Christian Gospel. Introduced here are new rituals, both cyclical and linear, new hymns, rituals that extend the scope of salvation to the spirit world, and family altars.

The penultimate chapter, on “comparative patterns of growth and decline,” appears out of place at first glance, since it embraces not only the Christianity of Japanese people but also that of Korean people in Japan. What holds it together is a consideration of “key difficulties related to the transplantation of Christianity in Japan.” Of particular interest in this chapter is the author’s attention to the subject of indigenization. After reviewing patterns of growth and decline among several organizations, Mullins flatly contradicts the view often taken for granted in discussions of church growth, namely, that failure to grow is a consequence of failure to “indigenize,” and conversely, that the higher the degree of indigenization, the greater the degree of church growth. Mullins says: “*The explanation that the general lack of response to Christianity in Japan relates to its failure to indigenize does not accord with the observable facts*” (his italics). He then introduces the subject of “inter-societal relations,” pointing out that the way people in the “receiving” culture perceive the relationship between their society and the society from which Christianity comes exercises a great influence on the reception of Christianity. In Korea prior to the Japanese occupation, Christianity was perceived as alien, but during the Japanese occupation, it came to be seen as a way of protecting and asserting national identity in the face of the occupier. In both pre- and postwar Japan, on the other hand, Christianity was perceived as the religion of a society that threatened to dominate the country, and for a time did so. Against this background, Mullins turns to a discussion of Korean Christianity in Japan: its transplantation, its incorporation of shamanism, its emphasis on charismatic Pentecostalism. He acknowledges significant growth in the Korean churches of Japan, but cautions against assuming that what seems to fit the current social climate in their case will assure church growth among Japanese Christians as well.

In his final chapter, “the broader context of Japanese Christianity,” Mullins points to the problem of succession that attends movements organized around charismatic leadership. Then taking note of the “selective appropriation of elements from the Christian tradition” among Japanese people, quite apart from institutional Christianity, he discusses ways in which some of the New Religions in Japan have incorporated the Christ figure into their mythologies. I

was particularly intrigued by his discussion of secularization theory, once taken as a “master key” to the understanding of religion by many influential sociologists of religion. Drawing attention to the fact that over half the Christian world population is now located in Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and Asia, and that dynamic new forms of Christianity are taking shape there, he expresses the view that comprehending Christianity in world perspective requires understanding not only its mainstream forms but also “the kinds of movements and new forms of faith considered in these pages.”

The book concludes with a “bibliographical guide to indigenous Christian movements,” a substantial section devoted to references and notes, a general bibliography, and an index.

What I think of this book has already been indicated. It is excellent. But there are a few points that I wish had been covered, or covered more thoroughly. I will limit myself to two points.

Methodology receives short shrift. Nearly everything Mullins says under this heading appears in two sentences: “In order to explain the development of these movements it is first necessary to understand them, which means becoming familiar with the language, symbols, and practices of those involved and discovering the significance accorded this involvement by the participants themselves. Field research, participant observation, and interviews, therefore, have been as important as documentary and archival research in this study.” Reading between the lines, one can only stand amazed at how much foot-slogging field research and sharpening of perceptions Mullins has achieved in this deceptively thin volume. And I would be the first to insist that it would be a terrible mistake to substitute methodological discussion for the fruits of research. Yet even so, I think it important that so distinguished a work give some indication as to how to begin such research, how to cope with problems that arise, how to identify criteria by which the work is guided, etc. This will be particularly important for the coming generation of researchers.

The foreign missionary stereotype used in this book is largely obsolete. I have no doubt that when Uchimura characterized Japanese Christian ministers as “supported either directly or indirectly by foreigners” and as “under the jurisdiction of foreign bishops,” he was deeply offended—and rightly so—by the very idea of subservience to a foreign power. And before World War II, his perception may well have been correct. Since the war, however, at least in the mainline Protestant churches of Japan, foreign missionaries go to Japan at the invitation of Japanese bodies (an invitation that must be renewed at the beginning of each new term of service) and work under Japanese superiors. They go to serve rather than to direct. Yet from this book one would think that missionary dominance is still the rule. The author’s focus is on indigenous Christian movements in Japan, not on the foreign missionaries, to be sure. But insofar as postwar missionaries come into the picture, the book gives a misleading impression.

Mullins has opened up a rich vein. His focussed research and wide-ranging reflection introduce the reader to a wealth of information and insight. He whets our appetite for more. To be specific, I for one would like to see not

only continuing studies of the “fringe” Protestant movements but also more studies of “inculturation” in the mainline Protestant bodies as well as in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. At some point, moreover, it will be important to go beyond the category of Christianity and consider how the indigenization process has worked in the case of other imported religions. Here one thinks immediately of Nakamura Hajime’s magisterial studies on the indigenization of Buddhism. Combined with similar studies of other cultures, this broader focus could eventually lead to what Mullins explicitly ruled out when preparing this volume: a general theory of indigenization. But even without going that far, it is clear that this book provides not only new information about a worthy theme and a new, thought-provoking perspective from which to understand a significant body of information but also a basis for future research that can advance our understanding of socioreligious phenomena in comparative perspective. A highly commendable achievement!

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