

Japanese Prayer Below the Equator

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How Brazilians Believe in the
Church of World Messianity

Hideaki Matsuoka

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The Church of World Messianity, a religion founded by Okada Mokichi (1882-1955), was introduced to Brazil in 1955. Messianity is best known for the religious activity Jhorei; transmission of the light of God by holding one's hand over a recipient. Messianity's doctrine and practice is strongly influenced by that of Shinto, a Japanese traditional religion. For this reason, it might be considered that Messianity would appear to be rather out of place in the Brazilian cultural milieu and different from Brazilian religious orientations. However in terms of doctrine and practice, there are some aspects that indicate continuity such as the belief in the existence of the world of spirits. During fieldwork of a pilgrimage bus tour with Messianity followers, the author encounters a busjacking where highway robbers take over the bus at late night. Through this incident Matsuoka develops his analysis of the acceptance of the religion by collecting interpretations of the busjacking from the pilgrims. Based on extensive fieldwork, this book studies several significant topics in anthropological study of religion such as sacred place, magic/religion argument, theodicy, conversion in Messianity. By doing so, Matsuoka not only elucidates the reasons why Messianity has been accepted by some non-ethnic Japanese Brazilians, but also analyzes the meaning and significance of fundamental features of the religion, which are common to Japanese new religions in general.

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