Our Nagasaki Legacy: An Examination of the Period of Persecution of Christianity and Its Impact on Subsequent Christian Mission In Japan

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Introduction

My Korean college roommate was the source of my first real information about Japan. Having spent nine years of his childhood in Japan, he had suffered the double ignominy of living as a Korean national and as a son of a Christian minister in Japan before and during World War II. I subsequently learned that the Christian church in Japan was a struggling miniscule minority, that the percentage of Christians among the Japanese population was one of the smallest in the world, and that there was something unique or different about Japanese attitudes toward outsiders. As a sense of my calling to mission in Japan grew, I entertained the hope that in serving here I might make some contribution toward positive changes in the statistics and attitudes. We arrived in August of 1959. The very next month we attended the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Protestant mission work in Japan. Since then many of us have shared with our brothers and sisters in Christ in the prayers and the witness and the work, looking always for the growth and progress of Christ's church in these islands. But to date we have hoped in vain for any great ingathering. The statistics remain virtually unchanged in 1982.

I stand firm in the conviction that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. But most of the people around us do not have ears to hear. And as I have considered my neighbors these twenty-three years, I have gained an increasing appreciation for Jesus' words as he gazed at that unreceptive city and said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You kill the prophets and stone the messengers God has sent you! How many times I wanted to put my arms around all your people, just as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not let me." Matt. 23:37. Virtually thousands of messengers of Christ before us have labored in this land. Probably a higher percentage of the Protestant converts have become evangelists and pastors here than in any other nation in the world. Yet the results in church growth have been meager indeed.

From the beginning, and right now, I am haunted by this question: Why is Japan so resistant to the Christian faith? I do not presume to have all the answers. I do not claim that what I am presenting here explains everything. I do contend that what happened to Christianity in Japan between the mid-sixteenth and the mid-nineteenth centuries is a major factor in the fortunes of the Christian mission in Japan right up to the present day. Let us
then, as briefly as possible, examine the historical developments of the period in question to discern what happened. And let us attempt to assess the impact of those events.

PART I: THE PERIOD OF PERSECUTION

A. The Historical Setting—the sengoku jidai

The history of Christianity in Japan cannot be understood apart from Japanese history. Allow me, therefore, first of all to describe briefly the situation in this nation in the period leading up to the first entrance of Christianity. I am convinced that Japanese society and the Japanese people of the sixteenth century were radically different from the society and people encountered by the Westerners who came in the nineteenth century and experienced by us today. I believe that Japan and the Japanese people have been totally transformed by what happened to them.

The feudal system became established in Japan from the twelfth century. The nation was composed of numerous feudal fiefs of various sizes. Each fief was ruled by its daimyo, feudal lord. Through his samurai, or retainers, he controlled and administered his domain, with its land and peasant farmers, artisans, and merchants. The early shoguns, the military dictators, organized a kind of coalition controlling these feudal domains. But by the middle of the fifteenth century any unity or order in the nation had broken down completely.

Japan entered into a period of chaotic political confusion known as the sengoku-jidai, i.e., the age of the country at war. In the fifteenth century a war was always being carried on somewhere, but during the sixteenth century the whole country was in a state of war.¹ As the sixteenth century progressed, the more powerful feudal domains subjugated and incorporated the weaker ones until Japan was molded into a political unity. The political reunification and tight control of Japan was mainly accomplished by three successive military dictators, namely Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Tokugawa Ieyasu.² The destiny of early Christianity in Japan was largely determined by its interaction with these three dictators and their policies.

In order to understand the nature and progress of the entrance of Christianity into Japan in the middle of that sixteenth century, we need a somewhat fuller picture of the social situation. Despite the political confusion, there had been a considerable flowering of Japanese culture, including the arts and literature, during several centuries. Buddhism had not only been imported from China and assimilated; several indigenous and unique branches of Buddhism had developed and prospered. However, by the sixteenth century, major Buddhist sects became also political and even military forces to be reckoned with in the nationwide power struggles. Internal commerce and even international trade had also begun to flourish by the sixteenth century. In fact, Japanese ships engaged not only in trade, but also in piracy, and became a major threat to Korea, the coasts of China, and even some places in Southeast Asia.³

But unless a few more details are painted into this picture of sixteenth century Japan, we will be left with a distorted impression. The histories of this sengoku period leave the overwhelming impression of perpetual war, of a repetition of rebellions and treasons, of continuous power struggles for supremacy, of political chaos and social confusion.
Bloodshed was commonplace, life was cheap, and the lot of the peasants was pitiful. Among the very common practices were mass slaughter of enemies, *seppuku* (suicide by disembowelment), killing for revenge, *tameshigiri* (testing a new sword by slicing a peasant in half), infanticide, and sodomy. When historians speak of this as an age of cruelty when little value was placed on human life, they are not exaggerating. Dire poverty and even frequent mass starvation among the peasant class were also part of the picture. It was into this land of immeasurable misery, toward the end of the most extended period of sustained military strife and general disorder in the known history of Japan that Christianity entered for the first time at the mid-point of the sixteenth century.

The period from 1549 to 1639 is sometimes called Japan's Christian century. What happened during that time had a profound effect not only on the progress of the Christian faith in Japan, but upon the very destiny of this nation. In an effort to gain as honest and unbiased an understanding of that history as possible, I have read quite broadly in preparation for this paper. I have examined accounts representing the perspectives of the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant churches, Japanese government publications, and Western scholars of Japanese history and culture. I have tried to gain as balanced a grasp as possible of what actually happened and the reasons behind these events. It is important to understand the manner of Christianity's entrance into Japan and the nature and extent of its penetration.

### B. The Era of Patronage

Portuguese traders were the first Europeans to make contact with Japan, in 1543. They introduced firearms to Japan. Regular visits for trade at Kyushu ports followed. Then on August 15, 1549, Francis Xavier, one of the original group of founders of the Society of Jesus, arrived in Kagoshima with two Jesuit assistants to begin missionary work. There is no question but that Francis Xavier was a deeply committed and very remarkable missionary. But it may also be said that he was a typical sixteenth century European in several ways. He did not particularly separate the cause of Christ and the cause of Portugal. Francis Xavier established in Japan the Jesuit policy of working from the top down, invariably attempting to gain the favor and permission and support of the feudal lords for his activities wherever he went. His goal was unequivocal. He "came to convert Japan, not to enlighten it." And he didn't hesitate to press political and economic advantages in order to achieve missionary goals.

Francis Xavier was in Japan for a mere two years and three months. His accomplishments arouse amazement. He and his colleagues spoke no Japanese and knew virtually nothing about Japanese culture and religion. Yet, through a semi-literate Japanese refugee they had brought back to Japan, who served as their interpreter, they immediately commenced missionary activity. Because their interpreter used Buddhist terms for God and other concepts, and because they had come from India where the Jesuit mission was based, Xavier and his colleagues were at first misunderstood to represent a different sect of Buddhism. Despite ignorance and obstacles they boldly attempted propagation. They soon began translating materials for teaching basic elements of Christian faith into Japanese. They even attempted dialogue with Buddhist priests. Amazingly, according to one report, Xavier
baptized 150 persons during his ten months at Kagoshima. During the remainder of his brief time in Japan, Xavier was able to also establish centers in Hirado, Yamaguchi, and Oita, as well as make an unsuccessful visit to Kyoto to meet the assumed ruler of all Japan. When Xavier left Japan in November of 1551, he left the work of the Jesuit mission there in the hands of the one priest and one lay brother he had taken to Japan as his companions. They continued to make new converts, and the Jesuit mission force was gradually enlarged.

The first part of Japan’s Christian century, from 1549 to 1587, may well be described as the era of patronage. Precisely because the country as a whole was disunited and in social and political chaos, the Jesuit missionaries were able to approach individual daimyō, urge permission for propagation, and impress them with the advantages involved. Numerous examples may be cited of the Jesuit missionaries’ gaining the cooperation or allegiance or even the conversion to Christianity of feudal lords through suggesting the advantages of Portuguese trade or military aid. Jesuit missionaries used their connections and local rulers benefited. This was particularly true in western Japan. Feudal lords were eager for the profits to be gained from trade. Reischauer describes the situation concisely:

Some Kyushu daimyō, noting the respect of the Portuguese merchants for the Jesuits, showered favors on the missionaries in an effort to attract trade to their domains. A few, motivated perhaps by a desire as much for economic as for spiritual gain, embraced Christianity and forced the people in their domains to follow suit. The small Omura daimyō, who was converted as early as 1562, founded the port of Nagasaki on the west coast of Kyushu and in 1571 made it the center of the Portuguese trade. In 1579 he actually assigned control of the town to the Jesuits.

Otomo, the much greater and more powerful daimyō, of what is now Oita, had patronized the Jesuits from the time of Xavier. He had pressured his people to convert by the thousands, but then he himself became a Christian in 1578. After that many minor daimyō in Kyushu also embraced Christianity. The Jesuits had been eager from the beginning to establish themselves in the Kyushu area, the cultural and religious and sometimes political capital of the country. In the late 1560's, this was accomplished. And converts in the central part of Japan also included a number of feudal lords. Especially in Kyushu and the Kyoto region, Japanese of all classes began to embrace Christianity in large numbers. By the year 1580, it is estimated that 150,000 Japanese had become Christians. This remarkable growth took place despite very small numbers of mission personnel. In 1561 there were only six Jesuit missionaries in Japan; and in 1570 there were still only eighteen Jesuit fathers and brothers in the Japan mission work. They depended heavily upon the assistance of Japanese catechists and interpreters to carry on the work. The brand of Christianity presented by the Jesuits had a certain appeal to samurai of this sengoku era by virtue of its emphasis on morality and loyalty and discipline and authority. At the same time their message had a salvationist appeal among the impoverished and suffering masses of the people.

As we consider the progress of Christianity during this period of patronage, we must not overlook the role of the most powerful person in Japan at the time. Oda Nobunaga began his military career in 1549 at the age of fifteen and before long had set about the task
of unifying the country. He rose to a position of power by becoming a master of *gekkokujo*, which means overthrowing one's feudal lord and taking his place. Becoming the most powerful ruler in the land by subjugating others, Nobunaga then had to prevent the same thing happening to him. For this purpose he made use of Neo-Confucian teaching of the ideal of absolute subordination. But it was basically by his military ability and ingenuity that he enforced it. Nobunaga is hailed as a great leader and unifier, but the fact is that he rose to power and enforced his authority by ruthless murders, massacres, espionage, trickery, and betrayal not only of his many enemies but also of his own family members, other relatives, and allies.¹⁷

By 1568 Nobunaga had seized control of the Kyoto region, and he continued to extend his hegemony. As mentioned earlier, several Buddhist sects had gained considerable power, especially in the Kyoto and Osaka areas. The political and military activities of the Buddhist warrior monks posed a major threat to the ascendant Nobunaga. Not for religious but for political reasons, they were his enemies. The monks of the great monastic center of the Tendai sect on Mt Hiei in Kyoto opposed him. He attacked their headquarters in 1571, burned its more than four hundred buildings to the ground, and killed its three thousand inhabitants. Nobunaga threatened the Shingon sect with the same fate if they opposed him. His struggle against the Jōdo Shinshū sect lasted ten years and culminated in the destruction of the Osaka Honganji main temple. In the process more than sixty thousand adherents were massacred.¹⁸

From 1569 the Jesuit fathers eagerly sought and gained and held the favor of this Nobunaga. His encouragement of the Jesuits "is explainable as a reaction of his avowed hate of Buddhist institutions and a side effect of his effort to extinguish their threat forever."¹⁹ And the phenomenal success of the Jesuit missionaries during this period was thus made possible by cultivating the favor of this ruthless dictator.²⁰ As it happened, Nobunaga found the Jesuits useful for his purposes.²¹ He seems to have welcomed personal encounters with the missionaries; he was interested in learning about European civilization. He respected the men, the products, and particularly the guns of Europe, but he feared none of them. However, Nobunaga was not aware of the facts of Portuguese and Spanish colonialism.²²

Nobunaga made great progress toward unification of the sixty-six provinces of Japan with the help of his able general, Hideyoshi, and his ally in eastern Japan, Tokugawa Ieyasu. Twenty-six provinces were clearly under his control when he was assassinated in 1582,²³ a victim of his own brand of brutality. During the period from 1569 to his death in 1582, Nobunaga's patronage of the Jesuit missionaries was most significant. The mass conversions in Kyushu and elsewhere began after Nobunaga's welcome of the missionaries became known.

After Nobunaga's death, his able general, Hideyoshi, soon took his place as undisputed ruler of central Japan. He then skillfully maneuvered and fought with large armed forces until he had subdued all of Shikoku and Kyushu, thus gaining control over all of western Japan. Hideyoshi seemed favorably disposed toward the Jesuits at first, and the missionary work flourished more and more under his rule.²⁴ Like his predecessor, his policy toward the missionaries and the church was lenient, while his attitude and actions toward militant
Buddhism were hostile and oppressive. Some of Hideyoshi's most trusted advisers and generals and retainers were prominent Christians. He was consistently friendly toward the missionaries and even intimate with some. The missionaries no doubt felt optimistic about the future of the church.25

But the missionaries and their policies were sometimes extremely unwise. A leading Jesuit priest got involved in deliberations with Hideyoshi about arranging for Portuguese ships to help in the conquest of Korea. And he even talked as though he could arrange for the Christian daimyō of Kyushu to cooperate with Hideyoshi and for other Portuguese aid.26 Another serious problem had to do with mission economics. By the 1580’s, the Jesuit mission in Japan involved 500 foreign and Japanese mission personnel and their residences, more than 200 churches, and educational and social work institutions. In order to support this large enterprise, the Jesuits had gotten involved in manipulating and playing the market in the Portuguese silk trade, and they were realizing enormous profits.27 Hideyoshi wanted to continue to have trade with the Europeans. However, because the nation's stability was so important to him, and possibly for economic reasons, he began to view Christianity with disfavor. He became suspicious that it might become the basis for subversive cooperation among the feudal lords of Kyushu.28

Toyotomi Hideyoshi issued his famous edict of expulsion on July 24, 1587. This act was a total surprise to the Jesuit missionaries, with whom he had been carrying on certain negotiations in a cordial manner only hours before. But this was no wild about-face. It was a rational political decision. Expelling the priests was simply a part of Hideyoshi’s program of restructuring Japan under his central authority. This step was basically a matter of internal policy. The edict was not really enforced, but Hideyoshi established a basic principle through it. He demonstrated that his reorganization of Japan was meant to be comprehensive, with no room for the pretensions to power and influence or participation in the profits of commerce on the part of the Jesuits. From this time the missionaries were seen as a possible threat comparable to what the Buddhists had been.29 Christianity was seen as “an external force and one engaged in political intrigue,” and it could not be ignored by a dictator like Hideyoshi.30

C. The Era of Antagonism

The second part of Japan’s Christian century, from 1587 to 1614, may be described as the period of antagonism. Despite the edict of expulsion of 1587, the foreign priests did not leave Japan. They immediately assumed a lower posture and continued their work. While some churches and schools were destroyed and the church lands in Nagasaki were confiscated by the central government, and although at least one Christian daimyō lost his property, no severe persecution took place at this time. The head of the Jesuit mission, Valignano, was able to appear before Hideyoshi in 1591. The purge directive was not rescinded, but the Jesuits were able to continue with certain conditions. Though unobtrusively, great progress was achieved with thousands of new converts. But then the course of events changed suddenly.31

Rivalries among Roman Catholics brought on their own doom. Despite the fact that the pope had given the Jesuit order the exclusive right to do missionary work in Japan,
Spanish Franciscans arrived in 1592. They came ostensibly to work out plans for Spanish trade and stayed to enter rather ostentatiously into missionary activity, having obtained permission from Hideyoshi for both. The end result was protracted bickering between the Jesuits and Franciscans and discordant political and commercial rivalry between Portuguese and Spanish. Such behavior deepened the suspicions of Hideyoshi toward the missionaries. He became increasingly aware of the association of missionaries and European soldiers in colonial outposts such as Manila.

And then a specific incident seems to have brought on a tragedy. A Spanish ship named the San Felipe, laden with a valuable cargo, ran aground on Shikoku in a storm. Ernest Best described what ensued as follows:

In an effort to save her cargo one of the officers is reported to have told the Japanese officials of the power of Spain and to have referred to the method by which Spain had conquered the world. This method, he is reported to have said, was to first send in agents of her Christian faith to win people to her and then to take over political control of the country. A report of this incident reached Hideyoshi and he became more determined than ever to banish Christianity from the land.

While the San Felipe incident was not the only factor involved, it was certainly a turning point. After this Hideyoshi's attitude toward the missionaries became one of "implacable but restrained hostility."

Taking advantage of the trouble over the San Felipe, Hideyoshi immediately issued a warrant for the arrest of all the Franciscans in the Kyoto and Osaka areas. Six Spanish Franciscans, a Japanese Jesuit brother, and nineteen other Japanese converts were condemned to death, publicly humiliated, and taken overland to Nagasaki under guard. There they were crucified on February 5, 1597, at Tateyama (now called Nishizaka), a place of execution on a hill in a suburb of Nagasaki. These people are known around the world as the Twenty-six Martyrs of Japan. Some other Christians were killed, too, at this time, and many exiled. They included not only Franciscan but also Jesuit missionaries. Churches and seminaries were also burned. Remaining missionaries went into hiding for awhile or worked very cautiously. Nevertheless many Jesuits did in fact continue their missionary activity, and the church continued to grow. The persecution ceased temporarily at the death of Hideyoshi in 1598. But at any rate, by the end of the sixteenth century the number of Christians in Japan had grown to more than 300,000.

Tokugawa Ieyasu came to power as the new ruler of Japan in 1600. He became the first of a long line of Tokugawa shoguns. Once again, the new ruler was quite tolerant of Christianity for awhile, and missionary work continued more or less unhindered. Scattered local persecutions did take place, however, and there were 132 recorded martyrdoms between 1600 and 1612, and thousands more of the Japanese Christians were stripped of their property and banished. From 1613 persecutions increased. The policy of Ieyasu himself was tempered by the fact that he was interested in trade, especially with the Spanish. But in 1609 the Dutch established their trade center at Hirado. Ieyasu learned from the Dutch envoy that Holland was not Catholic but Protestant. He concluded that by trading with Holland instead of Spain and Portugal he could avoid the necessity of patronizing Catholic Christianity. "Out of this unique utilitarian conclusion came an outbreak of renewed hostili-
ty toward the Catholics.\textsuperscript{390}

No doubt the religious and political rivalries of Europe that were reflected so virulently before the eyes of Ieyasu strengthened his determination to banish all missionaries and drive the Christian faith out of Japan. But this does not mean that Ieyasu really feared external military aggression against Japan. He, like his two predecessors, feared the subversion, the undermining of his quest for absolute power and authority over the nation. This is what brought about the further development of suspicion, hostility, and repressive action. This process ended finally in the Great Edict of Annihilation promulgated on January 27, 1614. Ieyasu became determined first of all to stop all Christian missionary work in Japan, and then to abolish the faith from among his subjects.\textsuperscript{41}

D. The Era of Martyrdom

The third part of Japan’s Christian century, from 1614 to 1638, may be described as the era of martyrdom. By this time there were perhaps as many as 500,000 Christians in Japan.\textsuperscript{42} It seems apparent, therefore, that while the mode of penetration and some of the policies of the missionaries may have been unwise or highly questionable and their behavior sometimes repulsive, nevertheless many Japanese had sincerely embraced the Christian faith. In fact, the percentage of Christians among the Japanese population in 1614 was probably about three times as high as it is today. Despite these large numbers of converts, however, that Japanese Catholic church was totally dominated by the foreign clergy. Efforts by the missionaries to train a Japanese clergy were too little and too late. Nothing was done during the first thirty-one years, despite the vision of Xavier at the beginning for a self-perpetuating Japanese Christianity. The first two Japanese were finally ordained in 1601. And when the general persecution broke out in 1614, there were still only fourteen Japanese priests.\textsuperscript{43} At that time there were fifty-five Jesuit missionary priests as well as some Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians. In addition there were perhaps fifty Japanese lay brothers and several hundred Japanese catechists.\textsuperscript{44} Though these many catechists had no formal training or place of authority or influence in the Catholic hierarchy, they had been remarkably effective as evangelists and lay teachers, a crucial factor in the spread of Christianity. It was no doubt helpful that the movable press brought to Japan by the Jesuits in 1590 was used to print numerous materials in simple Japanese, such as devotional tracts, for use in the propagation of the faith.\textsuperscript{45} Unfortunately, they never translated even a major portion of the Bible into Japanese.

The period of martyrdom that began from 1614 was very different from the sporadic persecutions that had preceded it. But it is important also to note that both the style of ministry and the nature of the Christian constituency had changed considerably during the previous fifteen years. Those who were merely Christians of convenience had apostatized. No longer able to use patronage and political intrigue for their purposes, and possibly chastened by their experiences, the missionaries and their colleagues concentrated more on their catechetical and pastoral work. Believers became more deeply rooted in the faith. They were also encouraged and prepared to accept martyrdom. They were thus not easily defeated by the intense persecution that followed.\textsuperscript{46}

As a direct result of the Great Edict of Annihilation of 1614, more than 400 missionar-
ies and their Japanese associates were assembled at Nagasaki, put on several foreign ships, and sent away as exiles to Manila and Macao. However, at least thirty-eight foreign priests had gone into hiding and managed to escape being sent off. Christianity was forced to go underground, but it continued to carry on despite the burning down or confiscation of all churches. Twenty Jesuits and many other foreign priests managed to slip into the country by various infiltration plots to help carry on the work in secret.

After the death of Ieyasu in 1616, under successive Tokugawa shoguns, a much more thorough and brutal persecution was carried out. It became more and more widespread and intense, but Christianity was not easily stamped out. From 1617, public executions of both foreign priests and Japanese Christians increased. Most of the more ostentatious and large-scale executions took place at Nagasaki and Omura by beheading or burning at the stake. The martyrdom was at its height in 1622. But despite this public display of the consequences of refusing to give up Christian faith, and despite the step by step annihilation of all the church's leaders, the persecution was not achieving its desired effect. While some of the upper-class Christians apostatized, most of the believers, especially the peasants, would courageously accept martyrdom rather than recant. More extreme measures were adopted.

The government's administrator at Nagasaki from 1626 to 1633 developed extremely excruciating types of torture. To the beheading and burning at the stake were added methods such as sawing asunder with a bamboo saw, stabbing to death with a spear, torture till death in the Unzen hot springs, burying alive, and finally, ana-tsurushi, i.e., hanging the victim bound upside down in a pit with his head just above excrement until death. This last torture, ana-tsurushi, was the most painful and horrible. Victims usually lasted anywhere from one day to a week or more. These unmatched anti-Christian horrors were implemented in an effort to somehow elicit an apostasy by whatever means might be necessary.

As to the methods used to force apostasy, there was always an effort toward a kind of intellectual persuasion, but also invariably an ultimate reliance on torture. In the classical interrogator's mode, they used the jarring switch from the soft, pliable manner to the harsh, threatening tone. Assaults with rhetoric followed up on any signs of a disoriented mind. And in the end apostasy in writing was demanded.

On October 18, 1633, the then head of the Jesuit mission, Ferreira, was subjected to the ana-tsurushi. After five hours upside down in the pit, they were successful in forcing his apostasy. From then on, this horrible method became the mainstay of torture. After his apostasy, Ferreira was used as a tool of the government to help force others to apostatize. The demonic inquisitor, Inoue Chikugo, was determined to destroy the image that Christianity was insuperable. He didn't want martyrs. He wanted apostates in order to attest to the impotence of Christianity.

As a result of the persecution, Christianity in Japan increasingly became an underground movement. In order to abolish Christianity, the Tokugawa rulers had to develop means for ferreting out remaining believers. Tokugawa Iemitsu, shogun from 1623 to 1651, initiated a plan that involved Buddhism. He established the system known as the dankaseido, which meant that every Japanese household was required to register its affiliation with a Buddhist temple. This made Buddhism in effect a state institution and a part of the government's system of social control. Buddhism changed from a religion with lay believers...
affiliated with it to *ie-no-shūkyō*, the religious affiliation of the household. The chief priest of each temple had to evaluate the religious conformity of the parishioners and report regularly to the government. In effect, the Buddhist priests became spies for the government in its anti-Christian edict enforcement program.

In addition, the people were divided into groups of five families, called *gonin-gumi*, for collective responsibility. In other words, people had to spy on their neighbors and verify that they were not related to the subversive religion of Christianity. And further, related to this whole system of surveillance was the infamous practice of *ebumi*, or picture trampling. According to information at the Shrine of the Twenty-six Martyrs in Nagasaki, “every year, from 1627 to 1858, all citizens of Nagasaki and other parts of Japan were forced to step on a holy picture or bronze medal (*fumie*), as a proof that they were not Christians.” Especially in Kyushu, this became a regular part of New Year celebrations. The ceremony was conducted either at homes or at a Buddhist temple, and record books were kept to verify compliance with the laws requiring this test. Of this use of the *fumie*, Drummond says, this practice was only part of the extensive system of surveillance carried on throughout the country, but perhaps more than anything else it symbolized the government's hostility toward Christianity, from which in turn an abhorrence of the faith as an evil thing developed among the general populace.

As a part of its calculated anti-Christian campaign, two related derogatory terms came to be used by the government to designate Christianity, namely, *jakō*, which means evil sect or diabolical religion, and *jashūmon*, meaning the evil faith. These terms were used on *kōsatsu*, the edict boards or signs put up all over the country stating the prohibition of Christianity.

So the missionaries and their converts suffered an inescapable fate. Their only choice was that between martyrdom and apostasy. The program to eradicate Christianity was ruthless and total. Tokugawa Ieyasu and his successors had made certain that organized religion would have no power in the Japanese state. They reduced Buddhism to obedience and suppressed Christianity, and they went on to enforce their rule upon the people using Confucian teachings interpreted to their own taste. But it is interesting here to note the difference in the fates allotted to Buddhism and Christianity. George Elison says,

Buddhism had set deep roots in Japan and adapted to Japanese conditions. Christianity could do neither, and was an alien religion. That was the crucial difference. Buddhism could not be erased and was used; Christianity could not be used and was erased.

That is to say, by the middle of the 1630's the authorities thought that they had erased Christianity. In the winter of 1637-38, however, Shimabara became the scene of one additional horror. Christian peasants of Shimabara and Amakusa arose in rebellion as a result of the cruel and intolerable economic and political oppression of their inordinately greedy overlords. The Shimabara Uprising, however, was without question religious in nature. No Portuguese and no priests, foreign or Japanese, were involved, but the peasants were spurred on by quasi-messianic hopes and proclaimed their Christian faith and their readiness to die for it. 37,000 peasants, including their families, assisted by a small number
of disaffected samurai, captured Hara Castle on the Shimabara peninsula and set up their defenses. It took five months and more than one hundred thousand samurai sent by the government to quell the rebellion. The end result was the total slaughter of the 37,000 insurgents.61

E. The Era of Isolation

It had been twenty-four years since Tokugawa Ieyasu had issued his Edict of Annihilation in 1614. It had been fourteen years since Tokugawa Iemitsu had begun to demonstrate his grisly intent to exterminate what they repeatedly called the jashumon, the evil faith. And the government was shocked when it realized that Christianity in Japan still had the vitality to give the spiritual impulse for a major peasant revolt. On August 4, 1639, making reference to the Shimabara Uprising, and accusing the Portuguese of continuing to smuggle Catholic priests into Japan, the government issued its final sakoku edict. Sakoku, meaning the national policy of isolation or seclusion, is a key term for the understanding of Japanese history.62 The government had announced already in 1637 that no Japanese was permitted to leave the country. Now this final sakoku edict prohibited all foreigners from entering Japan. Any caught entering would be executed. The only exception to this rule was a small number of Dutch traders, who would be kept under close surveillance.63 And further, any Japanese caught returning to Japan would also receive capital punishment. No ocean-going Japanese ships would be allowed. This total isolation policy was maintained until the middle of the nineteenth century by the Tokugawa shoguns.

The concern of the architects of the sakoku policy was to ensure that nothing disturb the balance of what still seemed to them a perilously organized realm.64 What motivated the closing of Japan was fear. It was not really a fear of the danger of external conquest, nor was it fear of contamination of national customs. It was a fear of domestic rebellions against themselves, of subversion.65 Tokugawa policy was designed to guard against revolt and in that way assure the permanence of Tokugawa rule.66 It is true that they justified the policy of isolation by means of "a nurtured stage of alarm at Christianity as the external threat." But it must also be said that there is clearly a causal relationship between the coming of Christianity to Japan as it did and the sakoku policy of the Japanese government.67

A subtle change took place as the nation moved from the sengoku-jidai, the period of the country at war, to the sakoku-jidai, the period of the nation's isolation. Sakoku was an age of power. By brutal expressions of power, the nation had been unified. Sakoku was the age of authority. The Tokugawa shoguns developed their well-calculated program to use whatever means necessary to enforce their absolute authority over Japan.

We have already indicated many aspects of the program for establishing and maintaining that authority as it related to Christianity. We have described not only the prohibition and the persecution itself, but also the use of Buddhism, of the neighborhood groups, and of the fumiie. But there is yet more to tell.

After the Shimabara Uprising, the search for any remaining Christians within Japan was intensified, and the expanded dragnet reached into previously neglected areas, as far
north as the Tohoku. As a result, between 1638 and 1640 the last few missionaries who had remained secretly active fell victim to the persecution. In 1640 the permanent position of inquisitor was established by the government for the purpose of carrying out a well-coordinated, nation-wide implementation of the anti-Christian policy. Many of the peasant-class Christians had verbally apostatized but were actually still practicing their faith in secret. Periodically some of them were discovered by the thorough techniques of the government officials. For example, in 1667, 608 Christians were discovered in Omura. 411 of them who refused to apostatize were executed.

In regard to the question of the extent of the martyrdom or the total number of martyrs, it is impossible to know with any certainty. The Roman Catholic Church officially recognizes 3,125 martyrs. However, they define martyrdom rather narrowly. Martyrdom of the well-known Christians was quite well documented. But most of the faithful believers were nameless peasants, and persecution took innumerable forms. Japanese statesman Arai Hakuseki claimed that between 200,000 and 300,000 Christians perished in Japan by 1650. This may be an exaggeration, but it gives us some idea of the thoroughness and ruthlessness with which the proscription of Christianity was enforced.

Another significant development was the use of a carefully orchestrated anti-Christian propaganda program during the Tokugawa period. It served the purposes of the rulers well to continuously use Christianity as a scapegoat. They demanded loyalty and obligation to the shogun, who took credit for having choked off the threat of the barbarians of this pernicious faith, or jashūmon. This diversion of anxieties to the outside reinforced the homogeneity that was already strong in Japan. Tokugawa Japan was thus molded into a single organism, it was fused into a social whole. The shut-in populace was malleable. To assist in the integration of the nation's allegiances, a calculated anti-Christian propaganda campaign was waged.

The image of Christianity as an evil faith threatening Japan was deliberately impressed upon the populace by means of a propaganda campaign using literature. The campaign was very artfully devised. Such literature was numerous and popular. At least 113 items of that anti-Christian literature are extant. Blood, brocade, and gold are constantly repeated images in this literature, in which the foreign priests dazzle with exotic finery and buy allegiance. And the end result is death. Much of this material, in simple Japanese, was aimed at the semi-literate. But there were also other works that were major polemic efforts at discrediting Christianity. These were produced with the assistance of prominent apostate priests. George Elison has done extensive research on this material and has made much of it available now in English translation.

During the course of the eighteenth century, the Christian threat emphasis seemed to fade away for awhile. Anti-Christian propaganda appeared almost irrelevant to the rulers. But about the beginning of the nineteenth century, a developing sense of an impending foreign crisis required its emphasis in Japan once again. Nationalists raised the cry of sonnō-jōi, meaning revere the emperor, repel the barbarians. These patriots again used the image of the Christian peril, of Christianity as a pernicious foreign religion that was a threat to the well-being of Japan. Vilification of Christianity was a basic part of their nationalistic program. They did not distinguish between the Christian peril and the foreign threat of conquest.
PART II: THE IMPACT OF PERSECUTION ON SUBSEQUENT MISSION

A. The Overall Effect

Looking back over all that happened, it can be said that many Japanese accepted Christianity, but Japan rejected it. What a paradox here! The significance of its coming to Japan "is not in the triumph of Christianity but in the effect of its defeat."73

Japan's Christian century had run its course, and what remained? It has been estimated that approximately 1,000,000 Japanese people were baptized during that time. Allowing for deaths from natural causes, the numbers of those who apostatized or emigrated to other countries, and the thousands martyred, historian G. B. Sansom has estimated that there were perhaps as many as 100,000 Christians left in Japan practicing their faith in concealment at the mid-point of the seventeenth century.74

We all know the remarkable stories of the discovery more than two centuries later that some of these believers had persisted in passing on their faith in secret for seven generations. Many of the *kakure-kirishitan*, or hidden Christians, of the period of isolation returned to the fold of the Roman Catholic Church during the latter third of the nineteenth century. These people had to be re-taught in order to bring them in line with orthodox Roman Catholic belief and practice. Others of the *kakure-kirishitan* on some of the offshore islands of Nagasaki Prefecture such as Ikitsuki, Hirado, and Goto refused affiliation and persist even today as a separate religion. The nature of the faith of the scattered groups of believers practicing their faith in secret during those long years of prohibition must have varied greatly. But in general, I believe that George Elonson describes the situation accurately when he says that the *kakure-kirishitan* "continued guarding in deepest secrecy a faith which gradually deteriorated and merged with the grassroots of native popular religion."75 The issue of the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* for December, 1980, carries an excellent article by Ann M. Harrington entitled, "The Kakure Kirishitan and Their Place in Japan's Religious Tradition." Examination of the *kakure-kirishitan* who have persisted in isolation until today reveals that while continuity in form or practice with the Christianity learned from the missionaries four hundred years ago is observable, basically they are a Japanese religion in which the basic tenets of the Christian faith are totally absent. They survived by adapting, by ceasing to be Christians.

We must conclude, therefore, that what remained from Japan's Christian century in terms of the Christian church or a Christian community was very little indeed. The annihilation and isolation policies had been eminently successful in eradicating Christianity from Japan.

But that does not mean that when Christianity encountered Japan once again in the nineteenth century it could begin as though the first encounter had never happened. As I said earlier, the significance of Christianity's coming to Japan is in the effect of its defeat. By means of all that happened during the period of persecution, Japan has been effectively inoculated so as not to contract the disease called Christianity. And if the original period of persecution served as the initial inoculation, then perhaps we could draw out the metaphor further and say that subsequent Japanese history has provided repeated booster shots.

163
What, then, has been the effect of Christianity’s defeat? What impact has the period of persecution and isolation and everything associated with it had on Japan and on subsequent Christian mission in Japan? Let me share two quotations. Edwin Reischauer says,

> The two centuries of strictly enforced peace under the watchful eye and firm hand of the Edo government have left an indelible mark upon the people. The bellicose, adventurous Japanese of the sixteenth century became by the nineteenth century a docile people looking meekly to their rulers for leadership and following without question all orders from above. They grew accustomed to firmly established patterns of conduct. A thousand rules of etiquette, supplementing instructions from their rulers, governed all their actions. As a result of this rigid regimentation of society, the Japanese became a people who lived together in their cramped islands with relatively few outward signs of friction.  

And Japanese church historian Tomonobu Yanagita says,

> The horrible persecution of Catholic Christians in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was Japan’s answer to the first Christian challenge, but the country did not escape the consequences of the bloodiness of that answer. Of her own volition, for two and a half centuries Japan cut herself off from the rest of the world. … By restricting themselves in this way to their own narrow civilization the long isolation implanted an insular spirit in the Japanese people and destroyed their concepts of the dignity and freedom of the individual. The semi-feudal and surprisingly unenlightened thinking of many Japanese even today can be traced to that national isolation policy of the Shogunate. The anti-Christian spirit in the country, therefore, not only is linked to these characteristics, but also has been accentuated by them.

The consequences of those 300 years had been immense. Japan and the Japanese had been transformed. Persecution, surveillance, and propaganda had implanted an anti-Christian and anti-foreign feeling deeply into the minds and hearts of the Japanese populace. A kind of folk memory of aversion and fear of both the Christian faith and its adherents had been created.

The following example substantiates that aversion. Shortly after Harris managed to work out treaty arrangements with Japan for the United States in 1858, other nations followed suit. When the Dutch envoy worked out his treaty, he was told by Japanese officials that they were ready to allow foreigners all trading privileges if only a way could be found to keep opium and Christianity out of the country. What a commentary that opium and Christianity were spoken of together!

**B. The Experience of the Protestant Pioneers**

When Protestant missions to Japan were initiated in 1859, the missionaries experienced this aversion and fear directly. Guido Verbeck of the Reformed Church mission was one of the pioneers who arrived that first year. He served in Nagasaki during his first ten years. In a letter from Nagasaki, Verbeck described the situation he and his wife had encountered there,

> We found the natives not at all accessible touching religious matters. When such a subject was mooted in the presence of a Japanese, his hand would, almost involuntarily, be applied to his throat, to indicate the extreme peri-
lousness of such a topic. If on such an occasion more than one happened to be present, the natural shyness of these people became, if possible, still more apparent; for you will remember that there was then little confidence between man and man, chiefly owing to the abominable system of secret espionage, which we found in full swing when we first arrived and, indeed, for several years after.... By the most knowing and suspicious, we were regarded as persons who had come to seduce the masses of the people from their loyalty to the 'God-country' and corrupt their morals generally. Other accounts of those first years are also revealing. They repeatedly mention the prevalence throughout the land of the hatred of foreigners and Christianity. Missionaries found that people were very suspicious of them. Not only were they themselves watched closely, but also people who came into contact with them came under strict surveillance. A language teacher could turn out to be a government spy. Missionaries could feel the hatred of some of the samurai, and were sometimes insulted or even threatened or assaulted. And Verbeck reported that while the upper and official classes expressed bitterness and hatred toward foreigners in general and Christianity in particular, the lower classes showed a curiosity about foreigners but a wide-spread and deep-seated fear of Christianity.

Henry and Elizabeth Stout succeeded the Verbecks as the Reformed Church missionaries at Nagasaki in 1869. Ten years had passed since the coming of the first Protestants, but the situation had not improved. In fact, a persecution was carried out of hidden Christians in Nagasaki who had come out into the open, i.e., the Urakami-Kuzure, and ambitious patriots were calling for the expulsion of the foreigners, calling them the “outside barbarians,” and the new Meiji government re-enacted the law prohibiting Christianity. Antagonism, suspicion, and fear of Christianity were being intensified. Beside the path up the bluff leading to the Stout home stood one of the new signs erected by the government. The sign read, “The evil sect called Christians is strictly prohibited. Suspected persons should be reported to the proper officers, and rewards will be given.” Such were the conditions under which the Stouts labored.

Under pressure from foreign governments, on February 24, 1873, the Japanese government finally ordered the removal of the notice boards prohibiting Christianity. However, attached to the order was an explanation stating that the prohibition of Christianity in Japan was so well understood already that any further public notice had become unnecessary. Abe Yoshiya says,

Thus by the spring of 1873 the Japanese government had adopted the policy of tacitly permitting the practice of the Christian faith by Japanese people. It tolerated Christianity, however, not as a positive acknowledgement of the principle of religious freedom but primarily as a means by which to improve its image among Western powers, to facilitate the removal of the unequal treaties, and to attain equality with the West. Henry Stout succeeded in winning and baptizing his first converts in September, 1873, and organizing the first Protestant church west of Yokohama at Nagasaki in December, 1876. But Stout’s letters of the period speak repeatedly of the fact that almost none of the converts to Christianity were natives of the Nagasaki area. Stout’s report for Nagasaki Station for the year 1882 states;

The services in the chapel at Nagasaki are regularly carried on and a good
many strangers, visitors in the city, are often present, especially on Sunday evenings. But there seems to be very little impression made upon the residents of the place. This is the experience in all the missions here.

An effort was made last winter to organize work at Omura, a large town about twenty miles north of Nagasaki. But after repeated attempts the effort was abandoned from failure to get a hearing for the gospel. Omura, like Nagasaki, was one of the strongholds of Catholicism in former times, and there are many adherents still found in the vicinity. This seems to be the cause of the prejudice against every form of Christianity.

Asashi Segawa was the first convert baptized by Stout in 1873. He became the first ordained Japanese minister in west Japan, worked as evangelist and theological educator, and was Stout's lifelong colleague. Recently I made a fascinating discovery. I found an old church newspaper from 1895 containing a lecture presented by Asashi Segawa at an inter-denominational pastors meeting in Nagasaki. My translation of his lecture follows:

"The Reasons and Vicissitudes of the Aversion to Christianity on the Part of the People of Nagasaki."

In relation to my speaking on this subject in accordance with your decision at the last meeting, there are two things I must state at the outset. First of all, what I will say is based on my assumption that the attitude of Nagasaki people toward Christianity is different from that of people of other prefectures, that it is uniquely deeply felt. And secondly, I believe that what I will attempt to set forth here represents the general attitude of the major portion of the Nagasaki people, but I am aware that there may be some people in this region who hold somewhat different views or disagree with me.

I. Reasons for the Aversion to Christianity till Now.

A. Historical Understanding of Christianity. This has altogether to do with Roman Catholicism.

1. Their method of evangelism was at fault. At the time Christianity was first brought to our country and propagated about three hundred years ago, the missionaries repeatedly used religion as a political tool and politics as a religious tool. They created disorder in the process of carrying out their usual practice of establishing rule over the heathen barbarians. Especially among the people in Nagasaki, this is the tradition that has been handed down from their ancestors, and it is well known.

2. The Amakusa Insurrection. That this actually began among Japanese who professed to be Christians, and that it spread throughout the Shimabara district and caused great trouble for the soldiers of the neighboring feudal clans of that time is known by virtually everyone in Nagasaki.

3. Carrying Out of the Policy of Prohibition of Christianity. The older people were actually eyewitneses of such things as the rigorously carried out practice of ebumi used to discover any hidden Christians and force them to apostatize.

4. Misunderstanding of Doctrine. The people of Nagasaki have heard a lot about Roman Catholic doctrine. For example, they are aware that when Catholic believers die the priests go to the bedside and pour out holy oil and pray. But they mistakenly believe that this rite is a removal of the living blood. And further, because the meetings of the Catholic believers are usually held in such a manner as to not
draw public attention, they are thought to have something secretive about them.

5. Roman Catholic Persecution. The kind of persecution of which we speak mainly originated from the mixing of politics and religion. Government officials, as a result, used their power to suppress the people's religion. Because this repression had been particularly carried out at Nagasaki, it was well known to the people, to a much greater extent than among the people of other prefectures.

B. There is Adequate Evidence for the Above Realities.

1. Buddhist Temples. If you cast your eyes around in all directions toward the mountains in Nagasaki City, almost every place you look you will see the quiet precincts of Buddhist temples. These temples, built long ago, stand today as symbols of the policy and program of the Tokugawa government, which sent able priests of the various Buddhist sects to Nagasaki to enlighten the people and so enforce the prohibition against Christianity. In their magnificence and workmanship, these Buddhist temple buildings of this Chinzei district are such as to be unmatched elsewhere. And the Buddhist priests, even to this day, have exercised a great deal of authority over the ordinary people, telling the history of the building of their temples in ancient times, and making a great effort to openly explain why Christianity ought to be detested.

2. Now looking up and to the north from the center of Nagasaki City, a hill may be seen. That is the infamous hill upon which it is said that some two hundred years ago, when a great persecution of Christianity took place like meek sheep many children of God were mercilessly killed by crucifixion for the sake of the children of this world. We must recognize that this silent hill has from of old spoken and even now speaks profoundly to the people of Nagasaki of the history of the persecution of Christianity.

3. There is also the evidence of the history of the persecution at the beginning of the Meiji Era in the village of Urakami on the western outskirts of the city. Any citizens of Nagasaki thirty years or older are very familiar with the facts as eye-witness observers. Twenty-four years ago, the new Meiji government, like the Tokugawa government before it, was very lacking in any understanding of religion. Simply using the authority of the government, it tried to force the Roman Catholic believers of Urakami to apostatize from the religion they had held to for so long. Reverting to the practice long followed by the government, both Buddhist and Shinto priests were sent to persuade the villagers, but to no avail. Then they were taken to government offices where efforts were made to convince them and they were threatened, but this, too, failed to get the desired result. So they were suddenly divided into small groups and sent off to various clans as exiles. They were separated into small groups and taken away so quickly that in many cases parents and children or husbands and wives were separated and sent off to different clans or prefectures. No further description is needed for us to be able to understand their sorrowful condition. Their rice paddie land, their homes, their personal property, and even their clothes were taken and given to those who claimed to be Buddhists and to hate Christ-
tians. After several years the exiled and dispossessed Christians were allowed to return to their hometown of Urakami and are fortunately now able to enjoy religious freedom. But even to this day that living history remains as a major reason for the aversion of the people of Nagasaki to Christianity.

C. For Social Reasons This Teaching Is Despised. In this part of the country, Christianity was for generations passed on among people of more remote islands away from this surrounding country. On that account, the Nagasaki people have made up their minds that Christianity is a religion of the lower class poor and not to be taken seriously by proper citizens of the community. They look down on Christianity in a way not seen in other districts.

D. People Do Not Distinguish Between Catholicism and Protestantism. Among ordinary people of the community, it is thought that Christianity means the Roman Catholic religion brought to Japan many years ago. And the way in which Japanese adherents are looked upon, as if they were traitorous subjects and conspirators, is a situation not seen in other parts of Japan. As we carry on evangelism in our country, this is a dominant factor in impeding the progress of our work.84

From the perspective of Protestant pioneers at Nagasaki, we have gained pictures of the situation in the 1860's, 1870's, 1880's, and 1890's. They clearly reveal the persistence and continuance of a strong anti-Christian influence. Now, a century later, we might expect that the healing of time would have erased all of the effect of that hideous history. What do we find?

C. Our Experience of the Impact on Christian Mission

I believe that my own personal experiences and those of my many colleagues during twenty years in Saga and Nagasaki Prefectures stand as clear proof of the continuing impact today of the persecution and prohibition and all that has accompanied them. As a part of the process of preparing this paper, after doing considerable research and thought on my own, I taped extended interviews with four of the pastors who were my colleagues in Nagasaki for many years. I sought insights from them and learned from them. But this process also served to clarify and verify my own experiences and observations and interpretations and the findings of my study.

I will present some concrete illustrations, but also try to convey a kind of composite picture of our experience here. No doubt many with long experience in Japan will be able to identify with our perspective on what we have encountered. We feel that this history of persecution and prohibition has affected all of the Japanese, but that its effects may be seen perhaps a bit more clearly in Nagasaki where they have for so long been more deeply felt. Allow me therefore now to present some examples of our experiences and some conclusions.

Let me begin with an episode some years ago in Saga. A middle-aged woman had been attending a Bible study group for seekers for a year or two. The pastor felt she might be ready for baptism and encouraged her to consider it. After considerable thought, she offered a rather striking response. Yes, she'd been thinking about baptism, but somehow
she couldn't forget the cross. Puzzled, the pastor asked her what it was about Jesus' cross that bothered her. She responded that oh no, it wasn't Jesus' cross that bothered her. It was those crosses of the martyrs in Nagasaki. After 400 years, those crosses still haunt us. The folk memory of them seems to say very loudly to Japanese people that Christianity is evil, is inappropriate for Japanese people, is anti-Japan.

All of us have encountered derogatory terms referring to Christianity in the course of our ministry. People today are still familiar with terms such as jukyō, diabolical religion, and jashūmon, the evil faith, as references to Christianity. Yaso, for Jesus, and yasokyō, for Christianity, are terms still sometimes heard as words of derision, reflecting persistent prejudice. Kuro is another term, originating either from cross or from the Japanese word for black, that is sometimes used to refer to Christians in a derogatory manner. These latter terms are of a nature comparable to “nigger” in English. Christians in the western Kyushu region have been and still are sometimes the object of discriminatory language.

Pastor Akira Nakamura grew up in Tokyo. He has now been pastor of Omura church for about thirteen years. He says that in Tokyo nowadays a Christian may be an object of respect, but in Omura a Christian is an object of contempt. A sizable group of the descendants of the hidden Christians lives in Omura today. Their occupations, their marriage possibilities, and their place in the community, or lack of it, reveal their status as a group being discriminated against. Their reputation as a despised group affects the Protestants in Omura as well.

In Hirado, where I was pastor of the Hirado Church for more than ten years, we had similar experiences. There are several Catholic churches and a large number of Catholics on the island of Hirado. The Catholic church members are virtually all descendants of the hidden Christians. One village, called Neshiko, is an entire community of kakure-kirishitan who remained separate from the Roman Catholic Church and continue their identity as a separate religion. This group, in my judgment, could in no way be considered Christian. The entire focus of this group appears to be that it possesses some mysterious secret rituals. By others they are simply seen as an eccentric religious group. All the others of the many descendants of the hidden Christians on Hirado island apparently returned to the fold of the Catholic church many years ago.

When I first began to serve as pastor of the little nucleus of Protestant Christians on Hirado, I was puzzled by the manner in which our church members spoke to seekers and visitors about the Catholics. They seemed to be trying too hard to establish a separate identity, to show that our church was different. After awhile I began to understand why. The Catholics are numerous enough in the community and have been an established religious group for so long that they are accepted as one of the possible ie-no-shukyo, or household religious affiliations. But at the same time that the Catholics are recognized by the community in this sense, they are also looked down upon. By many they are seen as culturally and socially of the lowest level in society, and perhaps a bit barbaric. In reality, as descendants of persecuted peasants and fishermen who barely survived on the fringes of society, they are still among the least educated and less well off. They are mostly the poorer farmers and fishermen, laborers, and small business people. They are not particularly known for high morals, and although very faithful in attending mass by the hundreds
at 6:30 a.m., most of them seem to lack much personal knowledge of or commitment to the Christian faith. That presents quite a contrast to the self-image of Japanese Protestant Christians. The longer I served in Hirado, the more I identified with this predicament of the Protestants.

Although some say the situation is improving recently, the Catholics even today are treated as a kind of outcast group within society. And discrimination against the Catholics affects our ministry, too. The general public does not distinguish between Catholic and Protestant. To the average Japanese person in the Nagasaki area, Christianity equals Catholicism. I have been called Shimpu-San, or Father, perhaps thousands of times. Inevitably, prejudices rooted in the history of persecution, prohibition, and propaganda affect Protestants as well as Catholics. We Protestants have to admit to feelings of resentment sometimes at being identified with the descendants of the hidden Christians. We feel wronged when treated as though we are a threat to the community and to Japan.

In my experience, the Catholics of Hirado today make little or no effort to evangelize. They concentrate on the work with their present constituency. Since we Protestants, at least in principle, are more oriented toward winning new converts, we are perhaps more affected than the Catholics by the impact of the period of persecution on the general populace. Every evangelistic effort runs into the wall of prejudice. The idea, or perhaps more accurately, the feeling that Christianity is a kind of jushūmon, an evil faith, has penetrated to and become embedded in the depths of Japanese hearts. It isn't a rational thing, it's a feeling, but it has an immense effect.

In my experience, and in the experience of all of my colleagues, the same scenario repeatedly confronts us. Almost invariably, when the issue of baptism is raised, problems arise. Most candidates for baptism are young people. Many families do not object to their children or young people attending a church. Often they encourage or at least approve it. It is only when a person makes a Christian commitment that confrontation occurs. When the seeker asks for baptism, the question of parental approval comes up. Usually, if parental approval is not received in advance, a traumatic confrontation comes later. Seeking approval in advance often results in extended discussions and postponement of baptism. Pastor Iijima says that it often takes three years to get parental approval or even agreement not to oppose it.

In Hirado, I had this experience. A boy in his last year of high school decided to be baptized. He had talked to his mother and I thought everything was all right. Some time after his baptism, the father learned about it. I received a very angry telephone call from him, accusing me of deceiving his son, and demanding that I rescind the baptism. Patient persuasion and a visit to the home eventually gained a happy result in this case.

Some cases are more difficult. One friend of mine in the Arita Church was actually disowned by his father and forced to leave home when he persisted in being baptized over his father's protests, and he was in his early twenties at the time. I have known fathers to use physical violence against their daughters in arguments about baptism. Such difficulties are not rare in Japan. When a young woman is to be baptized, it is often more difficult because of parental concern that marriage possibilities will be adversely affected if she becomes a Christian. Baptism is made a crucial issue in Japan because it relates not only
to marriage, but also to the family's albeit formal religious affiliation and to the family's grave and ancestor worship.

In Omura, when a young person decides to be baptized, the result is usually a family conference. Parents call in not only the grandparents but all the aunts and uncles to decide what to do about this young person who has opted for such deviant and questionable behavior. Inevitably, this results in considerable pressure on the candidate for baptism to change his or her mind. They would say that his or her name is registered at the temple, and it wouldn't do to get so deeply involved with Christianity. It thus appears as though the family is very religious or devoted to Buddhism. However, in most instances that is not the case at all. It is quite a different matter. Most Japanese say their religion is Buddhism. If we pursue a discussion on religion, however, we soon learn that most of them never attend Buddhist meetings or read Buddhist literature, they know little or nothing about Buddhist teachings or concepts, and their only contact with Buddhism has been through a Buddhist funeral or memorial service for a relative or ancestor. They often glibly joke about funeral Buddhism. Buddhism is not their personal religion or belief. They are not serious about Buddhism in that sense at all.

Buddhism is for most Japanese simply the family's nominal religious affiliation. This situation is the direct result of the *danka-seido*, the system under which each household was once required to register at some temple as a part of the program of surveillance to enforce the prohibition against Christianity. Of course, the Japanese government does not use Buddhism directly in this way today. But the system of family affiliation is still intact. And Buddhism still functions in the repression of religious freedom in general and in the perpetuation of discrimination against Christianity in particular. Even Buddhist priests today sometimes say that the *danka-seido* demoralized Buddhism. It has been abused by being used. And there is still a sense in which the *danka-seido* perpetuates a kind of prohibition and surveillance against Christianity, albeit in a more subtle way than in the past.

Since the Meija Era, Shintoism has also been used against Christianity. To this day, in Nagasaki, and also, according to our experience, in the city of Sasebo, participation in the shrine festivals and financial support of the local shrines are a kind of test of whether or not inhabitants are loyal Japanese. It serves as a kind of contemporary *ebumi*. The *gonin-gumi* of the past have been supplanted by the *tonari-gumi*, or neighborhood associations of today. This neighborhood group structure is of course useful in implementing cooperation in the community. But in fact they are used today as a means to force community support of local Shinto shrines. Christians who object on the basis of human rights or religious freedom are considered a problem and something less than true and loyal Japanese.

Pastor Ishii states firmly that there is even now no real freedom of religion in Japan. There is only the form of religious freedom. Christianity is still psychologically a forbidden religion for Japanese people. It is still, even when the word is not used, *jashumon*, the evil faith, the foreign religion inappropriate to a true Japanese. Of course, in Japan a person can believe what he wishes on a personal basis within himself. People did not object that Prime Minister Ohira had been baptized as a Christian when he was young. It was a
non-issue because he established his credentials as a Japanese and as a Japanese leader by going publicly to Ise Shrine and Yasukuni Shrine. But to live openly and enthusiastically with Christ and one’s church as the center and focus of life is still not acceptable behavior in Japan today. The impact of the persecution and prohibition and anti-Christian propaganda is still with us.

Another result of the general aversion to, and prejudice toward Christianity is its effect on Protestant Christians. It is as though they feel they have to live down the reputation of the hidden Christians as potentially subversive and disloyal Japanese. They tend to try especially hard to be thought well of by relatives and neighbors. Pastor Kobayashi puts it this way. Protestant Christians in Nagasaki tend to be good people (zennin) rather than righteous people (ginin). The biblical concept of righteousness does not mean being good people, who are liked and make a good impression on others. To be righteous means to fulfill the obligations of our relationship to Christ. That calls for courageous, prophetic discipleship. Pastor Ishii says that among Christians in Japan there is always the temptation to become contemporary hidden Christians at work or in the community. But he suggests we need Christians who will fight for right, and not hide.

Japan persists in labeling Christianity as something foreign. In an article in the Japan Christian Quarterly concerning a survey of Japanese views of Christianity conducted in 1977, this is borne out. The survey revealed that “upon hearing the name of Christianity many people spontaneously thought of a ‘foreign, Western religion,’ while Buddhism elicited the immediate association of being a ‘Japanese, oriental religion.’ ”85 This is a reality all Christians in Japan must still face today. The other religions in Japan are also of foreign origin, but 435 years after it was first brought to Japan only Christianity is still singled out as a foreign religion. This, too, shows the influence of all that accompanied the Christian century in Japan.

A Christian in Japan is a kind of perpetual stranger. He is an outsider, an alien, in his own society and culture. This includes the psychological note of estrangement. And in terms of place in society, it means that the Christian is a marginal person or a deviant person.86 To become a Christian in Japan today still means a commitment to be different, with all that that implies.

Earlier in this paper, the use by the unifiers of Japan of Neo-Confucianism was mentioned. The Japanese mentality even today is permeated by the influence of Confucian ethics, which assign a fivefold set of obligatory relationships. There are prescribed ethical standards for relationships between ruler and subject, husband and wife, father and son, elder and younger, and friend and friend. It is noteworthy that there is no place here for a stranger. The outsider is not included. The stranger has a certain freedom, but he need not be taken seriously. He can be ignored.87 Perhaps one of the dangers for Christians in Japan is that of beginning to accept or even prefer being ignored.

D. Concluding Thoughts

As a non-Japanese in Japan, I am of course a foreigner, a gaijin. What I forget sometimes is that my Japanese brothers and sisters in Christ are also foreigners. I am beginning to feel that it would be better if we all were less irritated by and less apologetic
about this role. We are called to serve Christ here in partnership as fellow-Christians. We
strangers have a task to do together. We are challenged to participate in preparing a
people of God in Japan who will in the future be neither used nor abused, but rather
infused with the power of Christ's love and patience and understanding and courage.

We have examined some of the reasons why Japan has been so resistant to the
Christian faith. The impact of that brutal annihilation, thoroughgoing proscription, forced
isolation, and anti-Christian indoctrination on the hearts and minds of the Japanese is all
too clear. We cannot help but mourn as we look back over that history. Yet reverence or
naive sentimentality in relation to the martyrs would be an inappropriate response. And
neither slumming nor sightseeing would be appropriate ways of looking at our Nagasaki
legacy. Seeing Japan and Christianity the way they were and the way they are invites
reflection on the path of the Christian church. It also calls for awe and rejoicing at the
miracle of faith we see in the many Japanese serving Christ today. Truly, with God, all
things are possible.

Eighteen hundred years ago Tertullian boldly asserted, “From the blood of the mar­
tyrs grows the seed of the church.” In the case of Japan, we wonder whether this might in
some sense be true.

FOOTNOTES
4 George Elison, Deus Destroyed: The Image of Christianity in Early Modern Japan, Cambridge, Massachusetts,
6 Ibid., pp. 29-31.
7 Elison, op. cit., p. 25.
8 Ibid., p. 252.
10 Drummond, op. cit., pp. 41-44.
12 Edwin O. Reischauer and Albert M. Craig, Japan: Tradition and Transformation, Tokyo, Charles E. Tuttle
13 Drummond, op. cit., p. 56.
14 Reischauer, Japan: The Story of a Nation, p. 92.
15 Sansom, op. cit., p. 125.
18 Ibid., p. 164.
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25 Drummond, op. cit., pp. 76-77.
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