

Pierre Sevaistre

A brief history of Catholicism in Japan



Santa Maria consoling Yasutaro
in his *sanjakuro* cage,
Tsuwano, January 1869

This document has been written by Pierre Sevaistre
at the occasion of the pilgrimage to Nagasaki
by the Foreign Community of the Sacred Heart Cathedral in Yokohama.
It reflects the author's point of view,
and it is not an official document of our Church

FEUDAL DOMAINS IN KYUSHU



The early evangelization 1549 – 1570

Saint Francis Xavier arrived in Japan on a Chinese junk ship on August 15th 1549. At that time Portugal had exclusive rights of navigation and trade in Africa and Asia; this exclusivity had been confirmed by the Pope in what was called the *padroado*, patronage, with the condition that the Portuguese would support the evangelization of these territories. The only place open to non-Portuguese in Asia was the Philippines that had been claimed for the Spanish crown by Magellan in 1521, coming from the East after discovering the now-called Magellan Strait.

In order to fulfil his obligations under the *padroado*, the King of Portugal had asked the help of the Jesuits and this is how Saint Francis was sent in India. Many of the Jesuits sent to Asia were Portuguese but there were also a number of Italians and a few Spanish priests. Saint Francis was very impressed and interested by China but the country was closed to foreigners. This is why he decided to go to Japan after talking in Malacca to Portuguese merchants who had started trading with Japan a few years before and also after discussing with a Japanese man called Yajirô.

He arrived with Yajirô and two Spanish Jesuits, Fr. Cosme de Torres and Br. Juan Fernandez. They landed in Kagoshima but the welcome of the daimyo there did not last long and they had to leave for Hirado which was a harbor used by Portuguese merchant ships. However, Saint Francis wanted to go to Kyoto, meet the king of Japan and get the authorization to teach and debate in what he called universities, that is the various headquarters of the Buddhist sects. This was the first contact between Christianity and Buddhism and Saint Francis had hoped to use the sects in order to bring salvation to the Japanese people. Saint Francis was in for a steep disappointment during his trip to the capital; there were no king in Japan, all feudal lords were fighting each other in an unending civil war and the Buddhists were unwilling to help what they saw as a competitor.

Because there was no king, Saint Francis decided to look instead for the support of the feudal lords and he started in Yamaguchi on the Honshu Island. He had some success there but the daimyo of Yamaguchi was overthrown and killed. The Jesuits had to take shelter in Bungo (present days Oita) in Kyushu where Portuguese ships were sometimes landing and where the ruling Daimyo, Ôtomo

Sôrin, was willing to have the Jesuits. Ôtomo Sôrin would be a very consistent support of the Christians, even if it would take him years before becoming one himself. Saint Francis left Japan after two years promising to send reinforcement. He would not return to Japan but die of illness on a small island in view of China, without being able to reach the mainland.

Other priests soon joined Cosme de Torres and Juan Fernandez. One was Fr. Gago, the first to study Buddhism and Shintoism and to advise to stop using expressions coming from Buddhism in order to translate Christian concepts; instead, the missionaries decided to use Portuguese or Latin words like *Deus* for God or *anima* for the soul. Another priest was Fr. Vilela who became fluent in Japanese and would be sent to open the mission in Kyoto. The third person was a Portuguese brother called Luis de Almeida. He was a doctor and a merchant and put himself and his money at the service of the mission. He was based mainly in Bungo where he created a hospital and an orphanage. But mostly he was an expert negotiator and he is the one who opened most of the missions in Kyushu by convincing many daimyos to authorize evangelization and to convert themselves in exchange for bringing the Portuguese trade towards their domains.

The first daimyo that he convinced was Ômura Sumitada, ruler of the territory around the Ômura bay, which included present day Nagasaki. There was no proper harbor in the Ômura domain; Almeida created one just outside the bay's entrance at Yokoseura but it was quickly destroyed by enemies. Ômura offered another port on the Pacific coast which was also attacked. In 1664 the Jesuits proposed to use instead the place called Nagasaki that was easier to defend. The Portuguese merchants found the place very convenient and soon a town was created which attracted many Japanese Christians from the Kyushu area.

The second daimyo convinced by Almeida was Arima Yoshisada, ruler of the Shimabara peninsula who authorized evangelization in his domain and would later become Christian. On Shimabara, Almeida would create two missions, in Shimabara city and the newly created harbor of Kuchinotsu.

Almeida also converted several other daimyos, in the Goto islands and on the Amakusa Island.

In 1559 Fr. Vilela had been sent to Kyoto with a Japanese brother known as Lourenço Ryosai. Lourenço was a blind ambulant biwa player when he met Saint

Francis in Yamaguchi and was baptized there. Being blind, he could not read or write but had an incredible memory and an unlimited power of conviction. He is the one who with Fr. Vilela have converted important people in Kyoto, including Dario Takayama, the father of Justo Takayama Ukon who has become one of the most famous Christian daimyos. In Kyoto, as there was no Portuguese trade to be negotiated, the Jesuits could only rely on themselves and the Providence. In 1564 they were joined by a new priest, Luis Frois, who would later write an history of the early evangelization in Japan. They had had some good success until the Shogun was overthrown and killed. They had to take refuge in the city of Sakai (currently a ward of Osaka). In 1568 Frois who had succeeded Vilela as the head of the Kyoto mission could return in the capital when it was taken over by a new powerful warrior, Oda Nobunaga, who was the first to unify Japan under his rule.

Nobunaga did not like the Buddhists whom he found too powerful. He was very curious about the Portuguese and needed their muskets. Frois was able to establish a good rapport with him and Nobunaga protected the Christians until his death. Takayama Ukon had become one of his most important vassals.

Extension of the Christian reach 1570 - 1587

When Cosme de Torres died in 1570, he was replaced by Francisco Cabral who had a very different vision of evangelization from his predecessor. Cabral had little respect for the Japanese culture, he thought that learning Japanese was unnecessary and that it would be enough to train young Japanese in Portuguese in order to become catechists. He thought that Japanese could not become priests and for evangelization he would rely on the political power of the Christian daimyos to impose it in their domains. He had some successes including the baptism of Ôtomo Sôrin in Bungo who had supported the Christians for nearly thirty years. Another success in Cabral's time was the conversion of Arima Yoshisada. The Arima domain was already open to evangelization but the baptism of its daimyo gave a new impetus for conversions there. Thanks to the good relations with Nobunaga, the Kyoto mission was also prospering. An Italian, Fr. Organtino, had replaced Luis Frois; he had erected a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary in the capital and when Nobunaga had a castle built in near-by

Azuchi he also made a church and a priests' house there. Close to the capital, another strong support of the mission was Takayama Ukon in his domain of Takatsuki.

In the three Christian domains in Kyushu, Ômura, Arima and Bungo, Cabral authorized or even encouraged the destruction of Buddhist temples. One priest, Fr. Coelho was very active in those actions. After being baptized, Ôtomo Sôrin decided to conquer the neighboring domain of Hyuga (presently Miyazaki Prefecture) and make it a Christian territory. This caused a war with the Satsuma domain, which he lost. He had passed the leadership of his domain to his son but the Bungo was seriously weakened and ceased to be a haven for the Jesuits. More and more the fathers were using Nagasaki as their main base. After the problems in Bungo, another difficulty arose in Arima when Yoshisada died and his son Harunobu refused to become Christian.

In 1579, the Jesuit Visitor of the Missions in Asia, an Italian priest named Valignano, came for an inspection in Japan. He was based in Macao which had been opened to Portuguese trade in 1557. Like Saint Francis, he was in favor of adapting the evangelization methods to the local cultures. He had sent to China another Italian, Fr. Matteo Ricci, who remains known for his adaptation to the Chinese customs. When Valignano arrived in Japan, he was shocked to discover that Cabral had not followed his instructions and he dismissed him. He received a warm welcome from Nobunaga in Kyoto. He requested that all missionaries should learn Japanese and he sent some veteran Portuguese brothers to be ordained in Macao. This is how Br. Luis de Almeida could become a priest in his late years. Valignano also created two seminaries one in Arima and the other in Azuchi as well as a college to train Japanese priests. He finally succeeded in negotiating personally the conversion of Arima Harunobu taking advantage of the fact that the young daimyo was threatened by enemies and needed the support of the Portuguese. In spite of the earthly motivations for his conversion, Harunobu remained faithful all his life.

It was also during Valignano's stay that Ômura Sumitada gave Nagasaki in perpetuity to the Jesuits. The main reason was that the daimyo felt unable to protect it and thought that the Jesuits and the Portuguese could do it better. Finally, Valignano appointed Fr. Coelho to replace Cabral as a superior of the mission and he left for Macao taking with him four boys of 14 years old to be sent to Europe and become ambassadors of the Japanese mission. They would have a very

successful stay in Spain and Rome and would return eight years later to Japan.

In 1582, Nobunaga was assassinated by a vassal. His castle in Azuchi was destroyed and so were the Church and the seminary. Organtino and the children took refuge in Takatsuki with Takayama Ukon. Nobunaga was replaced by one of his generals called Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Christians had had good relations with Hideyoshi and were hopeful. The new leader was using Christian samurais as generals; the most important of them was a friend of Takayama Ukon called Konishi Yukinaga. When Ôtomo Sôrin saw his domain invaded by the Satsuma (Kagoshima) domain, he asked for Hideyoshi's help. The strongman accepted; he sent an army which defeated Satsuma but it was the end of Bungo as a relevant domain. Hideyoshi appointed Ôtomo's son as the new daimyo of what was left of the domain but the young man was a poor leader and became increasingly anti-christian.

Hideyoshi's persecution 1587 - 1600

Fr. Coelho had been strengthening defenses around Nagasaki in order to make it a fortress. It had become a very active and rich town thanks to the Portuguese trade of silk with China. It was basically a Christian town with several churches. Coelho had acquired a galiot, which is a small warship armed with a cannon. He made the mistake of using that ship to visit Hideyoshi who had come to Hakata after the campaign against Satsuma. Hideyoshi was troubled by the growing military might of the Jesuits and decided to end it.

In 1587 Hideyoshi forbade his generals to be Christian. He asked Takayama Ukon to renounce his faith but Ukon refused and was dispossessed and banished. He then made the "*bateren* (padres) edict" requiring all Jesuit priests to leave Japan within twenty days. Christianity was not prohibited as such but daimyos could no longer force their subjects to become Christian or destroy Buddhist temples. Portuguese traders were still welcome but not their religion, which was described as maleficent and contrary to Japanese traditions.

It was a huge shock for the Jesuits. Hideyoshi took back Nagasaki from the Jesuits,

he sent a governor there and had all fortifications destroyed. The Jesuits were ordered to gather in Hirado in order to wait for a ship to Macao. However, ships of that time had to wait for favorable winds, which could take months and Hideyoshi accepted to be patient. The priests decided finally not to go away but to make themselves very discreet. They started going back to the various domains but without using churches, some of which had been destroyed.

In the meantime, Hideyoshi main concern was no longer Christians but his plans to conquer Korea. For that purpose, he needed the Christian daimyos and all of them were involved in the invasion except Takayama Ukon who had been banished. Their general was Konishi Yukinaga. At the beginning they were successful but after some months they came to a stalemate. This lasted for years.

Valignano decided to come once again to Japan in order to mend the situation with Hideyoshi. To that purpose, he had himself appointed as an envoy of Portugal Vice-Roy in India. With him, he took back the four boys that he had sent as ambassadors to Europe. Three out of the four entered the Jesuits and studied to become priests. Valignano succeeded having a meeting with Hideyoshi and even though he could not have the edict rescinded, the dictator accepted not to implement it. The Jesuits could stay in Japan provided that they remained discreet. They were allowed to send a bishop, Pedro Martins who was the first Bishop residing in Japan.

It was at that time that the first Spanish missionaries started coming from the Philippines. Spain had conquered Central and South America and from Mexico had also colonized Philippines. It had become a very powerful country which did not accept easily the exclusivity of navigation, trade and evangelization given by the Pope to Portugal in Asia and particularly in Japan. Valignano was afraid that the Spanish would disrupt the uneasy balance that the Jesuits has stricken with Hideyoshi and he had the Pope confirm this exclusivity but the Spanish started disregarding that order. In 1580, King Philip II of Spain became also king of Portugal and from that time, Spanish military and merchant started to take over what had until then been the exclusive domain of Portugal. To penetrate Japan, they used the mendicant orders, Franciscans and Dominicans who were eager to participate to what was seen as a huge success of evangelization in Japan. While Valignano was still in Japan, Spain sent an embassy from the Philippines, led by a Dominican priest, which circumvented the Jesuits. The embassy achieved no significant results and the envoy perished in a shipwreck on the way back. Spain

sent a second embassy including four Franciscans led by Fr. Pedro Batista Blasquez. Then again, they avoided the Jesuits and the Portuguese. Once more, they were not allowed to start a mission in Japan but they cleverly asked to see the palaces that Hideyoshi had built in Kyoto; once they were in the capital they remained there. They were well received by the Japanese Christians who had had no contact with a priest for years and for whom all priests were equal since they could provide the sacraments necessary for salvation.

Another group of Franciscans had arrived in Japan but Hideyoshi who had seen his offensive in Korea stalled was becoming wary of the Spanish in the Philippines. When a Spanish ship, the San Felipe, ran aground in Japan, its pilot was interrogated and said that in order to colonize new countries, Spain usually started by sending missionaries. Hideyoshi was probably waiting for an excuse and he ordered Fr. Blasquez and two other Franciscans to be arrested in Kyoto, together with three other Westerners and twenty Japanese close to the missionaries. Among them were two children of 13 and 12 years. The youngest one was called Ludovico Ibaraki. Fr. Nishimura of the Yamate Church has taken his name as a baptism name. Among the twenty Japanese, three were close to the Jesuits and studying to become brothers. They had no specific link with Spain but they happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Of the three, the one who is best known is Paul Miki a young samurai of the Kyoto region. He is represented in our Yokohama Church on the painting above the right side-altar.

The prisoners had one ear cut and were walked from Kyoto to Nagasaki in winter, a trip of 800 kilometers. Hideyoshi sent them to Nagasaki because it was the city with the most Christians and he wanted to send them a message. There, authorities chose a hill called Nishizaka which at the time was on the outskirts of Nagasaki and overlooking the harbor. Nagasaki's governor was moved by the youth of the two children and asked them to say the words that would have allowed him to spare their lives, but they refused. The twenty-six were bound on crosses and pierced with spears. This was a common execution way in Japan at that time; it would become much crueler later. They were killed before a crowd of Christians, including the Bishop Martins. The Christians could recover parts of the bodies which became as many relics. Paulo Miki had claimed his faith to the end and said that he was Japanese and not from the Philippines as written on the sign on his cross. All the 26 were declared blessed in 1627 while persecution was still raging in Japan.

This execution was a big shock for the Christians in Japan; Bishop Martins, the surviving Franciscan fathers and a few Jesuits had to leave the country. But rather than cowering the Christians, this event tended to reinforce their faith. Valignano decided to come a third time to Japan and with him he was taking the new Bishop of Japan, a Portuguese Jesuit named Cerqueira. They arrived in 1598 but Hideyoshi died of illness before they could meet him. When the strongman died, the campaign in Korea was stopped and all the Christian daimyos came back to Japan. Hideyoshi had no natural successor and one important daimyo called Tokugawa Ieyasu decided to conquer the country. He had behind him most of the Eastern daimyos while most Christian daimyos followed Konishi Yukinaga who had remained loyal to the late Hideyoshi. In 1600 a huge battle opposed the West armies to Ieyasu's East armies in Sekigahara. Ieyasu prevailed and Konishi Yukinaga was captured and decapitated.

The Tokugawa persecutions 1600 - 1644

After that, Ieyasu gave high positions to all those who supported him and among them there was a lone Christian daimyo, Arima Harunobu, who had been wise enough to have chosen the winning side.

Ieyasu at the beginning was not anti-Christian. He wanted to trade with Spain and Mexico and also to learn from the Spanish how to build ships. He allowed new Spanish missionaries to come to Japan and to start missions in new areas including his own town, Edo, the present-day Tokyo. Soon, Franciscans, Dominicans and Augustinians came to Japan, and Jesuits, on their side, also sent new priests to Japan bringing the total number of missionaries to around 130 persons. With the new missionaries, the number Christians started to surge again and would reach around 300,000 Japanese in 1614, the same number as in present days but with a much smaller population then. In 1601 the first two Japanese priests were ordained by Msgr. Cerqueira and joined the Jesuits. Other would follow as diocesan priests. The seminar was moved to Nagasaki and in addition to the priests ordained in Japan, some were educated by the orders in Manila or Macao, including three of the four former young ambassadors to Europe. The dream of Valignano to have Japanese priests was at last fulfilled but he had gone

back to Macao where he died a few years later.

The good situation of the Christians would not last. Ieyasu was not satisfied with the Spanish trade. He authorized new competitors, the Dutch and the English to settle in Hirado and start trade. The Dutch were very active. They were Protestant and had been under Spain's rule but gained their independence by force and continued this war against Spain and Portugal all over the world. Ieyasu also pushed the development of Japanese trade ships. One of the new Japanese merchants was Arima Harunobu who was trading with Cambodia. However, Harunobu had one ship caught in a fight in Macao where most of the crew was killed and the cargo confiscated. With Ieyasu's authorization, Harunobu took revenge during the visit to Nagasaki of the black ship from Macao on the following year. When this ship, which was called "Madre de Deus", was attacked, the captain-major rather than surrender blew himself up. Trade with Portugal was then suspended.

Another concern of Ieyasu was to keep the feudal domains under his domination and he was suspicious of the Christians because of their links with foreign countries that he could not control. This is when Harunobu made a serious mistake. He wanted to recover some land lost during previous feudal wars and accepted to pay money to a Christian who was working for one of Ieyasu's ministers. The man was a swindler and kept the money without doing anything. When Harunobu complained, Ieyasu was furious that Christians were trying to corrupt their way through his government. He ordered Harunobu to commit *seppuku* but the daimyo refused because suicide was prohibited by his faith. He was decapitated instead. His son in order to succeed him had taken a stance against his father and renounced his faith. Christians had lost their most powerful supporter. This misfortune was not isolated. Sometime before, Ômura's successor, Sancho, had had a land dispute with the Jesuits in Nagasaki. He also recanted his faith, turned Buddhist and became very anti-Christian. The Christians had lost all their feudal support in Japan.

In 1614, Ieyasu's son and successor signed an edict prohibiting the Christian Religion in Japan and commanding that all those who would remain in Japan should be arrested and executed. This was much more severe than Hideyoshi's edict and it applied to all Christians, not just to the foreign padres. Around 400 persons, lay or religious, Japanese or foreigners left Japan. Among them was Takayama Ukon, Dom Justo, who went to Manila. There he was asked to serve

the Spanish crown but he refused to take arms against his own country and died some months later. On the ship to Macao, there was Fr. Martinho Hara, one of the former four young ambassadors. There were also two Japanese seminarists who were leaving Japan, not because they were afraid but because they wanted to become priests which would be impossible if they remained. Their names were Petro Kibe and Mancio Konishi. We will meet them again.

Many others decided to stay in Japan and to go underground, 26 Jesuits, 7 Dominicans, 6 Franciscans and 1 Augustinian, plus 5 Japanese diocesan priests. One who stayed in Japan was Juliao Nakaura the remaining former young ambassador to Europe. Most of those who chose to remain would be captured and martyred.

Christians started being killed, in the Tokugawa Shogun's domain like Edo, but also in domains where daimyos wanted to court the favors of the new ruler like in Omura or in Arima. In Arima, Harunobu's son, Naozumi, sent three of his samurais to be burned at the stake but most of the people attending the execution were Christian wearing their rosaries over their kimonos. Naozumi took fright and asked protection of the Shogun who sent him in another domain and appointed one of his friends as new daimyo in Arima. At this time, there were still Christians ready to shelter priests in Japan, mostly in the countryside and missionaries could still move and communicate. New missionaries from the Philippines or Macao managed to enter Japan secretly and to remain hidden. However, repression was getting tougher every day. Four priests were arrested and executed in the Goto Islands. In Nagasaki, the Italian Jesuit Carlo Spinola was arrested and put in a narrow cage in Ômura with 30 other Christians.

The first mass execution happened in Kyoto in 1619 when fifty Japanese Christians from the Deus Quarter were burned at the stake. Among them, those who left the most lasting memory was the family of a samurai called Johannes Hashimoto and his wife Tecla who was burned with her five children, Catarina, Thomas, Petro, Francisco and the little Lucia whom she was holding in her arms. When the elder daughter Catarina called her mother for help, Tecla answered "My child, now is the time to invoke the holy names of Jesus and the Virgin Mary". This was related by an English merchant who was in Kyoto on that day.

The second mass execution happened in 1622 in Nagasaki's Nishizaka at the same place where the 26 martyrs has lost their lives twenty-five years earlier. This

time victims were both religious and lay people, both foreigners and Japanese. Women and children were decapitated first. Among them was Isabela, the wife of a Portuguese who had sheltered a priest. Carlo Spinola who was among the condemned recognized Isabela and asked her where was her five years old son Ignacio. She answered: do not worry, he is with me and we will both soon be in paradise. There is an image of Isabela showing the paradise to Ignacio above the left side-altar in our Yamate Church. In addition to Fr. Spinola there were five Dominicans including Fr. Morales who was their superior in Japan and also a Japanese Jesuit, Fr. Kimura who was one of the two first Japanese priests. He also had been locked in the same cage as Fr. Spinola for over two years. The men were burned at the stake but for the Shogun's people it was not enough to kill them. They wanted them to apostatize, in order to use it as a propaganda tool towards other Christians. To that purpose, they built the stake in a way that it would take a long time before killing the victims and they bound them loosely so that they could easily escape. None of them did.

A third mass execution happened in Edo in 1623. Ieyasu's son had passed the power to his own son, Iemitsu, who proved himself crueller than his father and grand-father. He controlled very closely all ships arrivals and landing secretly in Japan became all but impossible. Between 1614 and 1624, nearly seventy priests had successfully entered Japan but after that date among the thirty priests who attempted to do so, all were discovered, most of them immediately. It was very difficult to find a ship because the Portuguese and Spanish merchants refused to take priests aboard for fear of seeing their trade prohibited.

The new daimyo of Arima had been rather lenient towards Christians and several priests took refuge there including Fr. Pacheco who was superior of Jesuits. The daimyo had said to Shogun Iemitsu that there was no priest in his domain just before Fr. Pacheco was arrested. In order to protect himself he became very cruel; many priests and Christians were arrested and he invented a new torture in the volcanic scalding springs of what has been known since as the Mount Unzen Inferno. Boiling water was poured on the victims who were sometimes forced to enter into the ponds. The most famous martyr of the Unzen Inferno was a samurai called Paul Uchibori Sakuemon. A few days before he has seen his three children Baltasar, Antonio and Ignacio being mutilated and then slowly drowned into the sea. His last words were "Blessed be the Holy Sacrament".

The persecutions became very systematic and the authorities of Nagasaki

invented a new way of discovering Christians by asking people known or suspected to be so to tread holy images of Christ or the Virgin Mary called the *fumie*. Those who refused were immediately arrested and some of them burned at the stake or taken to the Unzen Inferno. Christians who accepted to tread the *fumie* were asked to sign an oath of apostasy. Most of the Christians accepted even if it was not sincere; they just wanted to save their lives. The missionaries had not told them that it was all right to tread the *fumie* but they had been preparing since several years for the time when there would be few or no priest left in Japan. They had the Christians organize themselves in Confraternities called “Misericordias”; they taught them how lay persons could baptize and also how a perfect contrition could lead to salvation even if there was no priest for confession. They even confirmed that last point in a Japanese leaflet called *konchirisan no riyaku*, the power of contrition; the Japanese Christians interpreted it as they could be saved from the sin of having treaded a *fumie*. With the progress of persecution, the confraternities became secret societies and would be the base of the Hidden Christians.

Around 1630, most of the priests had been arrested and martyred. The prosecutors had invented a new torture against Christians in order to obtain apostasies. It was called the pit (*anatsuri*); the victim was hanged head down in a pit and the agony could last several days leaving plenty of time for apostasy. In 1633 a Jesuit priest Cristovão Ferreira could not stand the torture and recanted his faith. He was the highest-ranking Jesuit left in Japan at that time and when the news reached Macao, nobody could believe it. Another Jesuit priest had suffered at the same time the same torments as Ferreira in Nishizaka but died without recanting his faith. It was Julião Nakaura, the last of the four young ambassadors to Europe.

In 1636 a group of four Dominicans and two lay persons tried to enter Japan through Okinawa but were immediately arrested and sent to Nagasaki. Among the priests, there were two Spaniards, one of them dying in jail, one French and one Japanese. One of the two laymen was a Filipino called Lorenzo Ruiz. He had been accused of a crime by the Spanish government and had fled, but he must have been aware, like his companions, of what was expecting them in Japan. They were submitted to a succession of tortures, water, needles under the nails and finally the pit. The Japanese priest could not stand the pain and asked to apostatize but the torturers would not stop tormenting him. His companions convinced him to come back to the faith. All of them were canonized in 1987 by Pope John Paul II; Lorenzo Ruiz is the first Filipino saint.

In 1637, there was a revolt in the Arima domain on the Shimabara Peninsula which also extended itself to the Amakusa Island. Was it a Christian revolt or just a popular revolt because taxes had become unbearable? Probably both, in any case the leader, a boy of sixteen known as Amakusa Shirô was said to make miracles and had written on his flag “Blessed be the Holy Sacrament”, the same as Paul Uchibori’s last words. The rebels resisted several months against the Shogunate army, which had even enlisted some Dutch ships to bomb them from the sea. They were finally defeated and all thirty thousand were killed on the spot. Since they died fighting, they could not be considered as martyrs.

After that revolt, the Shogun Iemitsu stopped all trade by the Spanish, the Portuguese and even by the Japanese merchants. He had all Spanish and Portuguese expelled from Japan. The Japanese themselves had no longer the right to go abroad and the only link left with the exterior was with the Dutch East Indies Company ships which were only allowed on the small artificial island of Dejima in the Nagasaki Bay. Japan became all but closed to the outside world, it would last more than two hundred years.

After the revolt, there were still a few priests hiding in Japan as well as some suspected Japanese Christians. The shogun nominated an inquisitor named Inoue in order to finish with both. The inquisitor’s action started with the priests; one of them was Petro Kibe who had left Japan in 1614 with his friend Mancio Konishi. When both men had arrived in Macao, they realized that the superior of the Jesuits there was not willing to ordain Japanese priests. They found a ship for Goa but the situation was not better there. Mancio Konishi found a ship for Europe but Petro Kibe decided to walk. It took him three years to reach Jerusalem. There he was welcomed by the Church and sent to Rome where he could finish his seminary studies and be ordained. He wanted to return to Japan and succeeded to do so in 1630. Because he was Japanese, he could remain in hiding and support the local Christian communities in the North of the country until he was arrested in 1639 in Sendai. He was sent to Edo to be interrogated by the inquisitor Inoue who asked the help of Cristovão Ferreira. However, rather than the apostate convincing Petro Kibe it looked more like it could turn the other way around and the Japanese priest was sent to the pit and was finally executed. He was beatified by Pope Benedict XVI in 2008 together with 188 martyrs of Japan.

It was very difficult for the Jesuits in Macao to accept that their main priest in

Japan had become an apostate. They decided to send two missions to Japan. All the members of these missions knew what would be the issue for them but they thought that their sacrifice would expiate Ferreira's apostasy and maybe move him back to faith. The first group was led by Fr. Rubino a veteran missionary in India. It had nine members including five priests and landed in Japan in 1642. They were immediately arrested and interrogated by the inquisitor Inoue. They underwent a first round of torture in the Mt Unzen inferno but none having lapsed, they were sent to the pit in Nagasaki at Nishizaka where all died. The next group had also five priests and five laypersons. They were also arrested and sent to Edo to be interrogated by Inoue. The inquisitor had learned that the priests resisted well to physical torture so he used a much more subtle psychological approach. He also used Ferreira and as a result, all became apostates. One of them, the Italian Giuseppe Chiara, served as a model for the main character of the novel "Silence" by Shusaku Endo from which Scorsese made a movie by the same name.

After that, there was only one free priest hiding in Japan. It was Mancio Konishi, Petro Kibe's companion, who also had been ordained in Europe and had succeeded coming back to Japan. He was a grandson of the Christian daimyo Konishi Yukinaga. He was captured and executed in Takatsuki, on the former domain of Takayama Ukon.

Having eliminated the last priest, the Shogunate authorities could organize themselves to eradicate all traces of Christianity in Japan. They invented several methods to that effect; they created registers of former Christians whose apostasy would be regularly checked. They also made enquiries within all people with some kind of social authority who also were submitted to the *fumie* test. They decided that every Japanese had to be registered in a Buddhist temple in what is known as *terauke* and all burials had to be done in the temples according to Buddhist rites. These methods were successful and Catholicism disappeared from Japan at least on the surface.

The hidden Christians period 1644 - 1873

Locally some people knew that the Christian faith had not been totally erased.

The authorities were afraid by the possible resurgence of revolts like in Shimabara. They led several anti-Christian campaigns in the population in 1657 in Omura's Kori, in Bungo's Usuki in 1660 and in Owari in 1670 with several hundreds or even thousands of people being executed. However, entering the 17th century, there were no more reports of important persecutions. The Christians had become better at hiding and also they were no longer seen as a serious threat and the communities could even restart some kind of communication between them.

During two hundred years, very little would happen in Japan from a religious point of view but the situation would be different in the neighboring China and this would later impact Japan. First, on the political point of view, Portugal and Spain had begun losing a great part of their power, being overpassed by Holland, England and France. France became the main country for missionaries, and many Jesuits in China were French and were following the steps of Matteo Ricci on adaptation. In 1622, the Propaganda Fide, a congregation of the Roman Curia, was created with the purpose of taking the leadership of the missionary action in the world, which until then had been entrusted to religious orders or countries. In 1653 the Paris Foreign Missions Society (MEP) was created and would become for a time the world's most important missionary organization. The MEP were under the direction of the Propaganda Fide and one of their objectives was to generate and educate an indigenous clergy. The MEP were very active in China; they entered into conflict with the Jesuits who, following Matteo Ricci's methods, were allowing some cult of the ancestors and Confucian tablets in the Churches. The rationale for the Jesuits was that these practices were not religious in nature but just traditions. This was known as the Chinese rite controversy and finally in 1742, the Pope prohibited all use of Confucian rituals.

Propaganda Fide had not abandoned the idea of sending missionaries in Japan. In 1840, it had appointed the MEP to take charge of Korea and to supervise Japan, but Japan was a closed country at that time. In 1844 with the help of the French Navy, the MEP send a priest, Fr. Forcade, in Naha which was the capital of the Ryukyu Kingdom, current days Okinawa. Ryukyu was an independent country, vassal to both China and the Satsuma Domain. It was possible to learn Japanese there. Fr. Forcade was appointed Bishop of Japan but would never go to the mainland. Instead, he sent several young priests to Naha. The chief of the mission was Fr. Prudence Girard who would build our Church of Yokohama. Another of these priests was Fr. Bernard Petitjean who would be sent to Nagasaki.

In 1854, Commodore Perry of the US Navy forced Japan to open itself. He signed a Commerce and Friendship Treaty and that example was soon followed by other great powers like England, France and Russia. As a result, the towns of Yokohama, Nagasaki, Hakodate and later Kobe were opened to foreign trade and to foreigners. In 1859 Fr. Prudence Girard came to Yokohama and started to build at Yamashita number 80 a church that he called *Tenshudo* (from Chinese, the Temple of the Master of Heaven) dedicated to the Sacred Heart and which was inaugurated in 1862. In 1863, Fr. Bernard Petitjean also came to Yokohama and then was sent to Nagasaki. There he finished a Church started by a colleague in Oura, in the East of Nagasaki close to the foreign settlement. The Church was also called *Tenshudo* and dedicated to the twenty-six martyrs. It was inaugurated in 1864 and called by the Japanese *nanbandera*, the barbarian temple, but no more than in Yokohama the Japanese were allowed to use it. Christianity was still prohibited for Japanese and the Churches were solely made for the foreigners.

However, the Japanese were curious and many came to see that strange building. On one day of March 1865, Fr. Petitjean was praying in the Church when a group of Japanese came in and a lady approached him and said “our heart is the same as yours”; then she asked “where is the statue of Santa Maria?”. Churches in Japan at that time all had statues coming from France, like in our church, and he showed her the one of the Virgin Mary. They were Christians from the Urakami village on Nagasaki northern outskirts who had remained hidden for over two hundred years and who decided to let themselves be known to the priests. Their ancestors had told them that they would recognize padres because they would not be married, have a special devotion to the Virgin Mary and follow orders from Rome.

Fr. Petitjean had hoped that he would find traces of the ancient Christians but he never thought that he would find a whole active Christian community. It was actually much more than that because he learnt that outside Urakami there were many hidden Christian communities on Sotome, in Amakusa, on the Goto Islands and elsewhere. The total population was thought to be between 50,000 and 100,000 persons. With the help of another priest, Fr. Laucaine, Fr. Petitjean started to secretly visit Urakami by night, both of them disguised as Japanese peasants. He learned that the Christian communities were headed by a *chôkata*, who was in charge of following the liturgical calendar and of leading the *orassho* (from oratio) the common prayer. There were also persons in charge of baptism, the only sacrament that they could do as lay persons, and who were called the

mizukata. There was no *chôkata* in Urakami but a senior baptizer called Domingo Takagi Senemon was acting as such and was the de-facto head of the community. The lady who had first approached them was called Isabelina Sugimoto Yuri.

Senemon introduced the priests to the communities in Sotome and even the Goto Islands and they could make a few secret visits there also. However, it was difficult to keep those moves hidden and the Nagasaki police, the *bugyô*, knew very well what was happening. In the course of history, they already had to deal three times with problems of Christians in Urakami, however they thought it was not very important and also the priests were French, from a country that was supporting their government.

In Rome, the Pope heard about the Hidden Christians discovery and Japan became a very high priority land of mission for Rome. Fr. Petitjean was named Apostolic Vicar (i.e. bishop). In 1862 the Pope had canonized the twenty-six martyrs and in 1866 he beatified two hundred and five martyrs who had been executed between 1617 and 1733. For a while the center of gravity of the Church in Japan moved from Yokohama towards Nagasaki. Back in Yokohama, Fr. Girard had died of illness at the end of 1869 and was buried in his Church.

The Urakami Christians were so happy to have found the padres again and to have access to Mass and confession that they became somewhat careless. One of the most difficult obligations for them under the Christian prohibition act was to make their burials according to Buddhist rites. They were afraid that it would impede their deceased loved ones to go to paradise and were doing ceremonies called *kyokeshi* (erasing the sutras) to cancel the Buddhist rites and redo the burial in a Catholic way. In 1867, they openly refused to bury any longer their dead in the temples. This was more than the Shogunate police could accept. They invaded the village in the middle of the night and arrested sixty-eight leaders. It was a miracle that Fr. Laucagne who was in Urakami that night could escape. All prisoners were taken to prison in Nagasaki and asked to recant their faith. As they refused, they were tortured and all except Sanemon said they rejected Christianity. Foreign consulates had protested against the arrest and the hidden Christians were soon released. After a few days with their families, they visited the village chief who was not Christian to withdraw their apostasy and say that they would go back to Christianity. Normally they should have been rearrested but the Shogunate government was crumbling under the Meiji revolution and they were left free.

When the Foreigners had forced their way into Japan fourteen years earlier, the Shogunate, which was not in a position to resist, handled the situation cleverly. They succeeded containing the foreigners in a few locations and tried to learn from them how to become stronger. But Japan was a feudal society and the Tokugawa domain had lost face towards the other daimyos. Some of them united, used the emperor as a figurehead and, in January 1868, overturned the Shogunate. Some hoped that they would be more lenient towards Christians but this was not to be.

The new government needed to unify what had been so far a feudal country and in order to reach that target, they became very nationalistic. For one of the key pillars of unification, they used Shintoism which during many years had been dominated and absorbed by Buddhism. They declared that Japan was the country of gods (*kami*) and that the first of them was the emperor. They even tried to prohibit Buddhism but this religion was so ingrained in the society, including for education, that it proved impossible. Instead, they turned against the Christians and renewed the Christian prohibition act.

In the course of the year 1868 around one hundred and thirty family heads of Urakami were arrested and deported in three different locations. Senemon was among the leaders arrested and with twenty-seven other companions, he was sent in the mountains of Shimane Prefecture at a place called Tsuwano. They were asked to recant their faith but as they refused, they were submitted to a near-starvation regime, exposed to the cold and many other tortures. Some abandoned Christianity, or at least said so, and were given more favorable conditions but others held firm on their faith and a few died for it. One torture used in Tsuwano was a 90 cm side cage called *sanjakurô* where the victim could not stand nor lie and was left outside in the cold without food or clothes. The first one to die of that suppliance was a young man called Wasaburô. It took him twenty days to die. The second one was called Yasutarô and when Senemon could manage to sneak out of his jail and visited him at night to comfort him, Yasutarô told him: “At night, I am never alone. When everybody is gone, a Lady with a blue dress and veil, like Santa Maria, comes and talks to me, I am never alone” and he added “please do not tell anybody before I die”. He died after thirteen days and his ordeal is reminded by a statue at the place where it happened, which is called the Virgin’s Pass in Tsuwano. Senemon survived but would spend many more years in that prison together with a young companion, Paul Moriyama who wrote a

chronicle about these events.

At the same time in Hisaka Island in the Goto Archipelago, a group of hidden Christians who had emigrated from Sotome in the 18th century was arrested and two hundred of them were locked in a room of twelve tatamis (20 m²) where they could not sit or lie. They remained there eight months, forty-two died of the ordeal.

Arresting the leaders in Urakami was just a first step, in 1870 the authorities in Nagasaki were ready to arrest and deport the whole population of the village, 3,400 persons, who were sent towards eighteen different locations mainly on Honshu. Some of them were sent to Tsuwano taking the total of deported Christians there to 153 persons. This time there were also women, children and aged people. They were submitted to the same ordeal. Paul Moriyama's younger brother of fourteen years old was beaten to death. Thirty-seven died during that time. For the other deportation sites, the situation was not better; out of the 3,400 deported people, more than 600 died of ill-treatments. This maybe little known but it was a real persecution.

All the foreign diplomats had protested against the persecution. They had met the highest members of the Japanese government but to no avail. Among them was the French minister Maxime Outrey who is the great-great-grand-uncle of the author of these lines. What finally put an end to the persecution was a two years mission in the USA and Europe made the Japanese government from 1871 to 1873 under the leadership of Iwakura Tomomi. The travelers wanted to learn how to manage a modern country but they were also eager to renegotiate the unequal treaties that they had inherited from the Shogunate. Everywhere, they were well received but no country would discuss the treaties as long as no written law was existing in Japan and as long as they would continue persecuting the Japanese Christians. When he came back in Japan in 1873, Iwakura decided that it was not worth continuing the persecution. The government did not immediately modify the edict but it ceased to apply it. The Urakami Christians could come back home and exert their faith more or less freely but they had lost everything. It would not be before 1889 and the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution that the freedom of religion would be officially recognized. However, the same Constitution was also saying that the emperor was descending from immemorial times, meaning from the Goddess Amaterasu. It was not explicitly written in the constitution that he was a living god but it was suggested. It would be a problem later.

Religion freedom and threats from State Shintoism

The Church of Japan which started operating from 1873 was composed of two main groups. The first one with around 70,000 former hidden Christians was the most numerous and its members were Christian by family tradition; being Christian was part of their identity. The second group in the rest of the country was built slowly on individual conversions, most of them by adults. Msgr. Petitjean had become the head of the Church of Japan but he wanted to remain close to Nagasaki and he asked Rome to split Japan in two dioceses. The North was given to another MEP priest, Msgr. Osouf who became archbishop of Yokohama and then Tokyo.

In Urakami, which had in the meantime become a part of Nagasaki, the Christians were extremely poor. They organized themselves with the help of the MEP clergy and in particular of a French priest called Marc de Rotz who helped them rebuild their means of subsistence. Fr. De Rotz was after sent to Sotome where he erected a church in Shitsu as well as a social aid center where women could work and earn some money. When the Urakami Christians had recovered some economic stability, in 1895 they started the construction of a huge church in the middle of what had been their village. It would only be finished in 1915. With a capacity of 4,000 persons, it was at the time of its construction Japan's largest church and it became Nagasaki's cathedral.

In addition to the MEP priests, several groups of French sisters were sent to Japan and worked mainly in popular education. They made vocational, primary or secondary schools for girls, including the Futaba school of Yokohama. The MEP fathers had also created a seminary in Nagasaki near the Oura Church. It was in the MEP objectives to train indigenous priests, most of them being the children of hidden Christians, like the sons of Senemon or Paul Moriyama. However, there were not enough Japanese seminarists and the education of that time with Latin as the sole liturgical language, was difficult for many Japanese. Indigenous priests tended to be used only in secondary tasks and all the bishops were French.

From around 1900, it became visible that the MEP, even helped by Japanese priests, could not alone cover all the country's needs. The Vatican then authorized religious orders from countries other than France to do mission work in Japan. It started with Spanish Dominicans from the Philippines in Shikoku. The Jesuits also came back to build what is the current Sophia University and enter the superior education domain which had so far been left to the Protestants. Franciscans from Germany and from Canada also entered the country and would be followed by Italian Salesians and American missionaries from Maryknoll. All this contributed to the development of the Church in Japan but it also brought a problem of unity, each missionary organization having its own territory and methods.

The Church in Japan then met a new challenge that was the increasing power of the military in Japan. Having learnt from the West, Japan became a strong military power. It made and won two wars. The first was against China in 1894, after which Taiwan became a Japanese colony; the second was against Russia in 1905, the first time that a non-European country defeated a major Western power. Japan gained the South of Sakhalin and these two victories gave the country a free hand in Korea that was annexed in 1911. Korea had as many Christians than Japan at that time. During the 1st World War, Japan joined the allies and took control of the German colonies in China and the Southern Pacific. All this made the military very powerful and under their influence the Japanese government started again to impose State Shintoism upon the whole country, including upon Buddhists and Christians. Problems started when the government decided to impose visits to the Shinto shrines by the students of the Catholic schools. The French Archbishop of Nagasaki protested but the official answer was that Shintoism was not a religion, it was history. The government was taking old mythology books as if they were historical truth. At that time the Church was refusing all contacts with religions outside Catholicism, even relations with Protestants were limited. The archbishop prohibited all participation to Shinto ceremonies in the Nagasaki diocese. The dispute with the state became an open conflict.

The Vatican tended to be less strict than the missionaries. Rome considered that the Church in Japan should become more Japanese and avoid conflicts with the state. The first step was to have a Japanese bishop and under pressure from the Vatican, Msgr. Hayasaka was anointed in 1927 and became Nagasaki's prelate. Msgr. Hayasaka was from a converted family in Sendai and had studied in Rome; he was therefore well known by the Vatican.

The political situation became more difficult when the Japanese army based in North-East China took the power in Manchuria in 1931 after a coup, without Tokyo's authorization, and created a puppet state called the Manchukuo. Manchuria had been a mission territory for the MEP and there were also more Christians there than in Japan. After that incident, the Imperial Army generals became uncontrollable by the civilians and started imposing their will upon the country. They considered that the Amami Oshima island was a defense priority perimeter and they arrested all the Christians there as spies; they expelled the Canadian Franciscans who were in charge of the island's mission. They threatened to close Sophia University because students had refused to visit a shrine.

Contrarily to the civilian government, the military did not try to pretend that Shintoism was not a religion. On the contrary, they were asserting that the emperor was a living god and that his will had to be obeyed without any restriction. However, they did not believe themselves in what they were saying, it was just a way to impose their own will under the emperor's name. Rather than destroying the Christians, they were trying to use them overseas to help them control the conquered territories. From 1937, China started to invade China and took nearly half of the country. There were three million Catholics in China. The China war operations became a swamp for the Imperial Army who after four years and many casualties could not progress more and decided to attack America and England who were supporting the Chinese.

The question for the Church of Japan had been to know whether it should accept the imposition of Shinto rites. The missionaries and even Msgr. Hayasaka were opposed but the Vatican was more flexible and was ready to accept the government's rationale according to which the Shinto rites were just a national tradition. Ultimately, the answer to that question was given by the Japanese government. The Church in Japan had to accept visits to Shinto shrines if it did not want to see all its schools and churches closed; the Vatican confirmed that this was the right thing to do. However, it proved to be not enough. The military were more and more hostile to the presence of foreign priests, bishops and sisters and more specifically in the Catholic schools. Bishop Hayasaka had retired and had been replaced by another Japanese, Msgr. Yamaguchi, coming from a hidden Christian family, but only one Japanese bishop was not seen as enough. Tokyo Archbishop Msgr. Chambon left his seat to a Japanese priest Fr. Peter Doi Tatsuo

who was consecrated.

This was still not enough because the government was now very much in the hands of the military and they had decided that all religious organizations should follow a new law in which all leaders had to be Japanese. This was against the practices of the Church but to avoid being disbanded, all foreign bishops resigned and Msgr. Doi with another Japanese priest named Paul Taguchi who was also consecrated, took the leadership of the Church of Japan. Msgr. Taguchi was known as a nationalist, close to the Imperial Army, but he had been educated in Rome. Both bishops said that there would be no risk of schism and they kept their word. They never tried to push for the nomination of a Japanese bishop who was not proposed by Rome.

When the Japanese armed forces attacked the Americans, the English and the Dutch in December 1941, the situation suddenly worsened. Canadian, American and English priests were arrested. The many French priests were in principle left free because France having lost to Germany was now considered as a neutral country. However, among the sixty-seven MEP fathers, several were arrested including Msgr. Breton. One of them, Fr. Bousquet, died of ill treatments received while in custody of the military police *kempeitai* in Osaka.

After the attack of Pearl Harbor, the Japanese Army had conquered Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Indonesia and many islands in the Pacific. With Philippines, it was the first time that they had conquered a country that was nearly entirely Christian. They asked Msgr. Taguchi to help them control the population and this provoked huge protests from the Church in America. However, Msgr. Taguchi's actions were mainly conceived to protect the Church in the Philippines and this was finally recognized.

The Japanese had conquered much more territory than they could defend and they started losing ground piece by piece, island after island in terrible fights. When the US bombed and attacked Japan's mainland, the Japanese military would not recognize that they had been vanquished for fear of losing face and vowed to keep fighting to the last Japanese in the hope that the Americans would be afraid by the enormity of their losses. This is when the Americans decided to drop two atomic bombs on Japan.

The second atomic bomb on August 9, 1945 was not originally intended for

Nagasaki but ended being dropped there because of weather conditions. It was dropped just above Urakami, above the hidden Christians area, above their cathedral. Many lost their lives; the Church was destroyed. It was difficult for the Christians of Urakami to understand why their fate had to be so terrible again and again. One man, a Japanese doctor named Nagai Takashi, tried to make sense out of the disaster. In front of the ruins of the cathedral, he made a speech saying that the Christians who had perished were a holocaust, a sacrifice offered for the peace of the world. Dr. Nagai had converted into Catholicism a few years before and his wife Midori was from a family of hidden Christians. She died in the bombing but their two children had been sent to the countryside and survived. Dr. Nagai had also survived but he was very sick. He was a radiologist at the time when people took little precautions against X rays and he had been irradiated well before the bomb. Knowing that he has but a few years to live he started writing. His first and most famous book is called the bells of Nagasaki. He spent his last years in a small hut called *nokyodo* that is still existing and can be visited where he wrote and received people. He is one of the most famous Japanese Christian authors.

After the atomic bombings, the emperor for the first time went against the military's will and decided that Japan should surrender. Japan was then occupied by the US Army and General MacArthur became the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Japan. MacArthur was an Episcopalian and he thought that the various Churches could help making Japan a true democracy. He asked the Churches to send missionaries to Japan. The Catholic sent around one thousand priests in about ten years. They were from many countries and missionary organizations, including many MEP fathers coming from China that had become closed after the Communist takeover. There were also many Franciscans. An important difference with the pre-war period was that the bishops were still Japanese and the various orders would no longer have territories but operated within the various existing dioceses. Peter Doi remained archbishop of Tokyo and was made a cardinal by Pope John XXIII. Paul Taguchi was made a cardinal ten years later by Pope Paul VI. It had taken a war but the Japanese Church was at last adult. It no longer was a mission country.

Post-war expansion of Catholicism and new threats

The Japanese had been terribly affected by the war and there was a need for spirituality after these troubled times. The number of Catholics increased rapidly and reached around 300,000 persons. On the spot of the Sekiguchi Church which had been destroyed during the war a beautiful cathedral designed by Tange was erected. In Nagasaki also a new cathedral was built close to the old one. In Yokohama, the Yamate Sacred Heart Church had survived the war and the bombardments. It is true that it was comparatively new since it had been destroyed in the 1923 earthquake and rebuilt under its present appearance in 1933. Its main priest, Fr. Le Barbey, had died in the Church during the earthquake; there is a memorial plaque for him together with that of the founder, Fr. Girard on both sides of the Church.

The Church of Japan is now confronted to its worse crisis since its beginning 470 years ago. Like many Churches in Europe, it is facing indifference. Families have had a hard time transmitting the Catholic faith to the next generation. Congregations are getting older and the number of churchgoers is decreasing steeply. As the whole population is graying, the number and the proportion of foreigners is increasing in Japan. There are already more foreign than Japanese Catholics in Japan. The same trend is happening for the clergy and there are more and more priests coming from Asia, Korea, Vietnam, India and the Philippines. As foreign Catholics in Japan, we now have a serious part to play within the Church of Japan and the Sacred Heart Cathedral since 1862 has always been on the forefront.

Pierre Sevaistre
Yokohama
September 2023



The Tenshudo Church at Yukohama, Yamashita-Cho 80