

From Prohibition to Toleration:  
Japanese Government Views  
regarding Christianity,  
1854-73

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Persecution of Christians by the Japanese Government during its period of seclusion (1633-1854) was well known to the West, and many accounts have been written in criticism of this practice. These accounts provide profuse illustrations of atrocities and persecutions, of the faithful perseverance of the martyrs, and of the courageous adventures of the missionaries; they also glorify providence for the final termination of persecution. They fail, however, to analyze the reasons both for the Japanese government's persistent suppression of Christianity and for its eventual repeal of the prohibition against Christianity. They explain neither the latent values behind the policy of religious repression nor the carryover of this policy from the Tokugawa into the Meiji era. It is the purpose of this paper, accordingly, to retrace from the viewpoint of the Japanese government the process that led to repeal of the prohibition of Christianity and to lay bare the latent norms that impelled the government to put this prohibition into effect.

*Background of the prohibition of Christianity.* Christianity, arriving in Japan in 1549, enjoyed the support of several influential figures, including the emerging supreme ruler, Oda Nobunaga, and several newly converted Christian daimyo such as Ōtomo Sōrin and Ōmura Sumitada. They lent their support to Christianity for two reasons. One was their need for a new spiritual authority with which, as rising leaders, they could counter the Buddhist or Shinto sanction for the traditional powers. The other was the need to make use of the Christian missionaries

as envoys to the Portuguese and Spanish merchants who could furnish them with advanced Western firearms.<sup>1</sup> Thus in this age of radical social reorganization, Christianity was both supported and used by the emergent powers in their struggle against the heretofore established powers.

As soon as the process of reorganizing the nation was practically complete, however, Christianity became an object of suppression. In July 1587, Oda Nobunaga's successor, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, ordered Christian missionaries banished, and in September 1591 he issued a decree prohibiting Christianity in toto. The decree declared that Christianity failed to conform to the syncretistic religious tradition that protected the order of the country, and it asserted that such a religion would, if permitted, undermine the new social order that had been established (Urakawa 1927, pp. 19-22; Watsuji 1963, pp. 507-15). Hideyoshi, as a dictator, saw to it that his decree was rigorously enforced by having twenty-six foreign and Japanese Christians crucified at Nagasaki on 5 February 1597 (Urakawa 1927, pp. 29-30). As supreme ruler of the country, he opposed further change and suppressed any forces he thought might lead to unrest.

When Hideyoshi died and Tokugawa Ieyasu seized suzerainty, the new overlord reinforced the policy of his predecessor. On 21 March 1612 he ordered in his own right the prohibition of Christianity and the destruction of all Christian churches. The following year he had all Christians arrested, and in May 1613, to ensure that there would be no Christians left in the country, Ieyasu instituted the well-known *terauke seido* or *danka seido* whereby every Japanese adult was required to register annually as an adherent of a local Buddhist temple and each temple was required to keep a complete register of its adherents.

Ieyasu's successors adopted additional measures designed to

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1. Detailed descriptions of the spread of Christianity in Japan during the latter half of the sixteenth century and the early part of the seventeenth are given by Watsuji (1963, pp. 251-548) and Boxer (1951).

stiffen the prohibition against Christianity. In 1626 the governor of Nagasaki devised a test that called for stepping on a Christian symbol. Originally, the aim of this test was to confirm the apostasy of those who claimed to have deserted Christian faith, but after 1643, it also functioned to expose underground Christians in general (Urakawa 1927, pp. 31–37, 48, 62). In March 1633 Tokugawa Iemitsu, in order to shield his subjects from the infection that might result from exposure to foreign influences, banned foreign travel by Japanese and prohibited Japanese people already abroad from returning to Japan (Boxer 1951, pp. 439–40). That same year he also had notice boards erected all over the country offering cash rewards to anyone informing on a Christian.

After the Christian uprising at Shimabara, lasting from December 1637 to April 1638, the shogunate became even more rigorous in its persecution of Christians. Its determination to keep Japan secluded from the rest of the world is evident in its June 1640 burning, in Nagasaki bay, of a Portuguese merchant ship whose leaders were suspected of having provided the Shimabara rebels with arms. Thereafter, anyone of daimyo or samurai status found to be a Christian was executed, banished, or forced to apostatize (Urakawa 1927, pp. 53–55, 77–78). By the mid-1640s the shogunate had exterminated or driven underground virtually the entire Christian population.

In the hands of the Tokugawa shogunate, prohibition of Christianity and seclusion from foreign contacts served other purposes as well. The measures taken to stamp out Christianity liquidated all spiritual dissidence within, and enforcement of the seclusion policy prevented interventions from without (Anesaki 1926, p. 1). This combination of prohibition and seclusion, operating over two and a half centuries, enabled the government to maintain a peaceful, albeit oppressive, regime.

*Issues regarding Christianity in the making of unequal treaties.* Japan's long period of isolation was finally brought to an end by the

United States in 1854. Following unsuccessful attempts to penetrate the country by clipper owner Charles W. King in 1837, Commodore James Biddle in 1846, and Commodore James Glynn in 1849, President Millard Fillmore, in 1852, entrusted the task of opening Japan to Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry (Beckmann 1962, pp. 108-9; Borton 1955, p. 11; Fairbank 1965, pp. 196, 200). Perry carried a letter from Fillmore addressed to the Emperor of Japan. It defined the objective of the American expedition as the establishment of friendship and commerce and the assurance of safety and a supply of coal and provisions for stranded American ships. This letter specifically assured the Emperor that the Americans did not plan to disseminate Christianity among the Japanese and referred to the fact that the Constitution and laws of the United States forbade all interference with the religious or political concerns of other nations (Hawks 1856, pp. 256-57; Miller 1942, vol. 6, p. 517; Pineau 1968, pp. 220-21). Identifying the primary concern of the expedition as the opening of Japan, and recognizing the deep-rooted antipathy of the Japanese toward Christianity, Fillmore affirmed that the United States would not meddle in Japan's religious affairs.

Perry first arrived at Uraga, a port at the mouth of Edo bay, in July 1853 and succeeded in handing the President's letter to Japanese officials who in turn sent it to the Shogun. The last-named referred the matter to his advisors and to some of the more influential daimyo. The majority of those consulted advised against opening the ports on the ground that seclusion had been the law for generations of forefathers (Fujii 1936, pp. 1-30; 1937a, pp. 65-84; 1937b, pp. 25-38; Beasley 1955, pp. 102-7). The most aggressive opponent of the Perry mission, Tokugawa Nariaki, the lord of Mito, arguing on the basis of National Learning, warned of the threat that Christianity posed to the values of nationalism and emphasized the importance of strengthening the nation in terms of both spiritual identity and military power (Fujii 1936, pp. 7-8; Fairbank 1965, pp. 194,

197). The government, however, was well aware of the changed times and the danger of being attacked, like China, by the Western powers. It therefore decided to accept the American demands and signed a treaty of amity with Perry on 31 March 1854 (Hawks 1856, pp. 377–79; Miller 1942, vol. 6, pp. 439–70; Pineau 1968, pp. 183–84; Fujii 1936, pp. 12–14).

While Perry's squadron was anchored off the coast of Japan, four American sailors died. On receiving permission from the shogunate, George Jones, the squadron chaplain, conducted four Christian funeral and burial services on Japanese soil (Hawks 1865, p. 446; Pineau 1968, pp. 165–66; Williams 1910, pp. 142, 180, 194–96). These incidents were taken by Perry as evidences of a permissive stance toward Christianity, and he consequently attempted, when presenting gifts to the Japanese officials and interpreters, to include a Bible and other Christian literature. On discovering Christian writings among the gifts, the Japanese officials adopted a stiff attitude and reproached Perry for violating the spirit of President Fillmore's letter, which had promised to refrain from involvements affecting the religious concerns of the Japanese people. The Japanese threatened to destroy all the gifts, while Perry, for his part, insisted on the importance of the Christian writings. The confrontation was finally settled when the Japanese returned the books and Perry agreed to accept them (Fujii 1936, pp. 14–17).

This event indicates that the Japanese officials handled the ban on Christianity as a strictly legal matter. They completely avoided any examination of the Christian religion in terms of its content. They were unanimous in abiding by the law of the land and thus were opposed on legal grounds to Perry's attempted interference.

The same year the Perry treaty was signed, the shogunate negotiated a treaty of amity with Adjutant-General Putiatin of Russia (Lensen 1955; Putiatin 1856). In the course of the negotiations, the Japanese side sought to insert into the treaty a clause affirming the prohibition of Christianity; the Russian side,

conversely, sought to secure a provision guaranteeing freedom to practice Christianity in Japan. The Japanese plenipotentiary, Kawaji Toshiaki, wrote to Putiatin proposing that since Christianity was legally prohibited in Japan, the Russian government should instruct Russian people coming to Japan not to propagate Christianity even if approached by Japanese people requesting to be taught. Putiatin, in his reply, affirmed that the Russians would not interfere with the religion of the Japanese and that they would respect Japanese laws while on Japanese soil. The shogunate regarded this declaration as an assurance by the Russian government that it would not promote missionary activities, and the matter was pressed no further (Tokutomi 1930, pp. 261-82; Fujii 1936, pp. 19-25). In the event, the Russo-Japanese treaty guaranteed the Russians the freedom to practice their religion in Japan, but did not include any provision that would prevent them from disseminating Christianity in Japan (Japan Foreign Office 1884, pp. 585-89; Lensen 1955, pp. 122-25).

Subsequently, the shogunate repeated its attempt to prohibit Christian missionary activities when it negotiated a treaty with the Dutch. The Dutch negotiator, Captain Jan Hendrik Donker Curtius, argued, however, that the Dutch government could not agree to something that had not been required of the Russians, that the inclusion of a clause prejudicial to Christianity would lower Japan's reputation among Christian nations, and that the Japanese government should cease requiring its subjects to step on Christian symbols as this practice might offer Western powers a pretext on which to initiate belligerent action against Japan. The shogunate accepted his advice and, on 29 December 1857, ordered the practice abolished. It informed Curtius of its decision and at the same time notified him that the abolition should not be interpreted as implying permission to import books, pictures, and images pertaining to the Christian religion (Fujii 1937a, pp. 71-74). Thus for fear of international repercussions, the notorious system whereby hidden Christians

had been rooted out was brought to an end, but this did not mean that Japanese leaders entertained the slightest doubt as to the legitimacy of prohibiting the Christian religion.

Meanwhile, the first United States consul, Townsend Harris, had arrived at Shimoda on 5 August 1856. In spite of his repeated urgings that a treaty of commerce and navigation be negotiated and that he be received in audience by the Shogun at Edo, Harris was obliged to cool his heels in Shimoda for over a year. At length, however, the necessary arrangements were made, and Harris set out for Edo in November 1857, being received by the Shogun on 7 December. Later, Harris was invited by Hotta Masayoshi, President of the Grand Council of State, for confidential consultations. In attendance at their meetings were such high-ranking officials as Hayashi Hōkō and Udono Nagatoshi, plenipotentiaries at the negotiation of the Perry treaty, Inoue Kiyonao, who later signed the Harris treaty, and Kawaji Toshiaki, who had negotiated the treaties with the Russians and the Dutch. Seizing the opportunity, Harris energetically set forth an explanation of world trends and the merits of foreign trade (Miller 1942, vol. 7, pp. 1044–47). On the subject of religion, Harris argued “that the principle of leaving men free, to follow the dictates of their own consciences, was adopted in most of the countries of the West, and that in all cases, it ensured the peace and happiness of the country; that the Portuguese who came to Japan 250 years ago apparently had three objects in view, that is, trade, conquest and proselytization, and that at the present day no nation desired to propagate its religious faith by force of arms” (Miller 1942, vol. 7, p. 1054).

In his draft treaty Harris included an article guaranteeing freedom of worship for Americans, and he presented this topic in formal negotiations on 25 January and 6 February 1868. The Japanese plenipotentiaries, Inoue Kiyonao and Iwase Tadanari, agreed to the inclusion of this article on condition that it read that neither Americans nor Japanese should interfere in

each other's religious affairs. Hence Article 8 of the treaty of 29 July 1858 reads in part as follows (Japan Foreign Office 1884, pp. 736-37; Miller 1942, vol. 7, pp. 957-58, 992-93; Gubbins 1922, p. 283):

Americans in Japan shall be allowed the free exercise of their religion, and for this purpose shall have the right to erect suitable places of worship. . . . American citizens shall not injure any Japanese temple or mia [*sic*]. . . . The Americans and Japanese shall not do anything that may be calculated to excite religious animosity. . . .

The shogunate also agreed to insert similar articles in the treaties with the Netherlands, Russia, Great Britain, and France, signed on 18, 19, and 26 August 1858 and on 7 October 1858 respectively (Japan Foreign Office 1884, pp. 295-96, 424, 593-94).<sup>2</sup>

The unequal treaties thus secured for foreigners the right to practice Christianity in Japan. The shogunate naively understood the treaties as stipulating that foreigners, within their concessions, might follow their own laws and exercise the freedom to practice Christianity, but that Japanese authorities would be free from the threat of foreign interference in the enforcement of Japanese laws, including the prohibition of Christianity. The Japanese government never suspected that these agreements would facilitate the dissemination of Christianity among the Japanese.

*Activities of foreign missionaries and Japanese Christians.* In 1859 the shogunate opened the three treaty ports of Yokohama, Hakodate, and Nagasaki, and Christian missionaries immediately rushed into the country and built churches at the foreign settlements there. Disregarding the agreement that limited their ministry to the foreign communities, the missionaries eagerly preached the Christian gospel to Japanese people whenever

2. The 21 January 1866 treaty with Prussia and the 25 August 1866 treaty with Italy include essentially the same article (Japan Foreign Office 1884, pp. 371, 462).



they could (Urakawa 1927, pp. 180, 200, 212, 223). Missionary activity in explicit violation of the treaties soon caused much trouble at all the open ports.

At Yokohama, French Catholic priests of the Paris Foreign Missionary Society built a chapel in January 1862 and preached in Japanese to a number of Japanese people gathered there. The police therefore arrested many Japanese as they were leaving the chapel. But the missionaries appealed to the French minister, who in turn requested the foreign minister to release them, arguing that the application of so harsh a law would be disadvantageous to Japan in its foreign relations. The problem was resolved with the immediate release of those arrested, the police explaining that the Japanese had gathered in the chapel solely for the purpose of sightseeing and that the priests had merely explained the building to them (Shibusawa 1918, vol. 4, pp. 36-37). In handling this question both the Japanese side and the French skirted the issue of how the treaty should be interpreted with respect to religious freedom. They thereby postponed an ultimate confrontation.

In 1865, with financial assistance from the French Empress Eugenie and Admiral Jaures, French Catholic priests of the same order built a cathedral at Nagasaki. The cathedral had a unique style and attracted many local residents even before it was completed. One day three women from the nearby village of Urakami recognized a statue of the Virgin Mary and confided to the missionaries that they held the Catholic faith. Subsequently, more Japanese Christians from Urakami and other villages in the vicinity visited the cathedral and acquainted the missionaries with the fact that the Catholic faith had been maintained in secret for over two centuries. Shogunate officials at Nagasaki, on becoming aware of this development, sent police to the cathedral for surveillance (Anesaki 1926, pp. 18-20; Urakawa 1927, p. 200).

The missionaries, excited at discovering underground Catholic believers, ventured far beyond the settlement boundaries and,

under cover of storm or darkness, visited the villages disguised as Japanese. At Urakami they assisted the villagers to construct as many as four chapels. As the villagers gained courage and confidence, the missionaries gave them instruction in Catholic teaching and encouraged them to observe it strictly.

When, in 1866, a Buddhist temple in the village of Urakami sought donations from its registered adherents (including the heretofore hidden Christians) in order to cover reroofing expenses, the Japanese Catholics, on the advice of the missionaries, refused to contribute. This infuriated the elders of the temple, and they informed the village head that there were Christians in their midst. On hearing this, the village head summoned those who had refused to make a donation and urged them to comply with village custom. He refrained, however, from punishing them, choosing instead the ambiguous solution of crediting them with willingness to donate but excusing them on the ground of lack of resources.

In April 1867 a local Christian died. The family, following the advice of the missionaries, rejected their Buddhist priest's offer to conduct the funeral. The village head thereupon summoned the family and ordered them to hold a Buddhist funeral, but the family, again instructed by the missionaries, not only refused to obey this order but also made explicit their profession of the Christian faith. Similar incidents followed, one after another, and the troubled village head finally referred the matter to the commissioner of Nagasaki. By mid-1867 both he and the nationalistic samurai of Hizen, Ōmura, and other feudal domains in northern Kyushu had definite knowledge of the survival of Christianity among the peasants, of peasant-missionary contacts, and of missionary activities beyond the borders of the concession (Anesaki 1926, pp. 20-22; Urakawa 1927, pp. 234-45, 377-405, 412-13).

The shogunate commissioner in Nagasaki, Tokunaga Hisamasa, continued police investigations for nearly half a year after becoming aware of the presence of Japanese Christians. Observ-

ing that he did not act immediately to deal with this violation of the law, the anti-shogunate samurai agitators in northern Kyushu made use of the Christian issue to denounce the shogunate for its negligence in law enforcement. Some radicals even planned to assassinate the missionaries and lynch the Japanese Christians. The lord of Ōmura, representing such feelings, wrote a letter to the commissioner of Nagasaki and strongly recommended that he have the Japanese Christians executed in order to demonstrate that the law of the land was in force.

At length the commissioner decided to act. On 13 June 1867 he had the police arrest sixty-eight Japanese Christian leaders. In three reports to the Council of State at Edo, the governor described the explosive situation created in northern Kyushu by anti-Christian, nationalistic samurai who were ready to take affairs into their own hands, and he requested authorization to suppress the Christians with severe measures in order to satisfy the radicals and thus restore peace and order (Anesaki 1926, pp. 3-4; Shibusawa 1918, vol. 4, pp. 37-38).

Learning from the missionaries of the arrest and torture of the Japanese Christians and pressed to take action, the French consul at Nagasaki, M. Leques, immediately protested to the commissioner and requested the release of those under arrest. On being refused, Leques referred the matter to the French minister, Léon Roches, who went to Osaka and requested an audience with the Shogun, Tokugawa Yoshinobu, then staying at Osaka Castle.

The Shogun received Roches on 21 August 1867, and Roches urged him, for the sake of Japanese national interests, to release the arrested Catholics. In a subsequent discussion with Itakura Katsushige, the Shogun's representative and a member of the Grand Council of State, Roches argued that persecution of the Christians would invite hostility against Japan among the Western powers. Itakura, in his reply, explained the difficulty the shogunate faced as a result of radical, nationalistic agitation. In the event, however, Roches and Itakura reached an agree-

ment according to which the shogunate would release the Japanese Catholics but confine them to the village of Urakami, while the French minister, for his part, would order the French missionaries to cease pastoral work and proselytization among the villagers (Shibusawa 1918, vol. 4, pp. 39–41).

*Shogunate leniency toward Christianity.* This solution showed the shogunate's growing leniency toward Christianity. In fact the Shogun shortly affirmed, in a letter to Emperor Napoleon III dated 4 September 1867, that in the future, when the Japanese people had attained a level of civilization equivalent to that of Western nations, Japan would follow the lead of the West in respect of religious freedom. The same letter, to be sure, stated that the shogunate could not yet rescind the law prohibiting Christianity since the majority of Japanese people still believed that Christianity was an evil religion and since any governmental act contrary to this view would cause much confusion and invite serious disturbances. The shogunate requested, therefore, that the French sovereign prohibit his subjects from disseminating Christianity in violation of the terms of the treaty, thus inducing Japanese people to break the law of their nation (Ane-saki 1926, p. 36; Shibusawa 1918, vol. 4, pp. 41–42). The fact remains, however, that the Shogun had openly affirmed in an international document that the Japanese government would before long permit religious freedom. He thus intimated that the basis for prohibiting Christianity had already crumbled.

It is also recorded that Hirayama Shōsai, a shogunate official specifically assigned to handle the Urakami case, told Leques in September 1867 that the shogunate did not regard Catholicism or Protestantism as evil forms of religion and that the government would certainly grant them freedom when the nation reached an improved state of civilization (Shibusawa 1918, vol. 4, p. 48; Urakawa 1927, pp. 481–84). Thus even though the law prohibiting Christianity remained in force, the Shogun himself and high-ranking officials who had come in contact with

Western diplomats and Western influences were beginning to assume a tolerant attitude toward Christianity.

*The anti-Christian policy of the restoration government.* The growing leniency of the shogunate gave opportunity to opposing feudal lords to accuse it of being weak-kneed in relation to the Western powers. At the same time a deep-rooted xenophobia became one of the major elements that united the antagonistic feudal lords in a determination to overthrow the shogunate. Before the unified attack of the lords of Satsuma and Chōshū and the forces of the imperial court, the shogunate proved incapable of effective resistance. On 14 October 1867 the Shogun, Tokugawa Yoshinobu, submitted to the Emperor a proposal that would return to him the authority to govern the nation. The Shogun's resignation was accepted the following day, and on 15 January 1868 a new government, formed by samurai from the Satsuma, Chōshū, Tosa, and Hizen domains together with radical nobles from court circles, declared the restoration of imperial rule.

In announcing the restoration to foreign diplomats on 13 February 1868, the new government affirmed that it would honor the treaties that the shogunate had concluded with the Western powers, but the Western powers viewed the new government with suspicion. For example, an American minister's dispatch, though written several years later, indicated that he and his diplomatic colleagues of that time regarded the new government as anti-foreign, ultra-nationalistic, and anti-Christian (Japan Foreign Office 1938-40, vol. 1, pt. 1, pp. 272-73). This observation was correct in that the confrontation between the new government and the Western powers with reference to Christianity became even more acute during the following years.

The early Meiji leaders sought to establish the spiritual foundation of the new government in accordance with the doctrines of the Hirata school of National Learning. Taking its lead from Hirata Atsutane (1776-1843) and his Shinto restorationists, the Hirata school held that the new government ought to be a

theocracy in which the Emperor, as head of state, would lead in worship of the indigenous kami and, as a divine being descended from the Sun Goddess, would rule his subjects who, for their part, were to venerate the Emperor and submit with unconditional obedience to his guidance. This was a dogma of quasi-religious nationalism neatly tailored to their urgent need for a spiritual symbol around which to unify the new nation. Imperial theocracy was inaugurated as official policy on 5 April 1868 with the promulgation of an Imperial Rescript on the Unity of Government and Religion and with the reinstatement of the ancient Department of Shinto Affairs (*jingikan*).

The shadow side of this fundamental policy expressed itself in reinforced plans for the persecution of Japanese Christians. On 7 April 1868 the new government's Grand Council of State (*dajōkan*) posted at major intersections throughout the nation a notice replacing one previously set forth by the shogunate. Item 3 of the new notice stated that the evil religion of Christianity was strictly prohibited, that anyone suspecting someone of violating this prohibition should inform the proper authorities, and that the authorities would in turn reward the informer (Japan Cabinet 1867-68, p. 67).<sup>3</sup> The restoration government thus started out by confirming the shogunate's long-standing prohibition of Christianity as a law of the new regime.

Shortly after the posting of this notice, the Resident Minister of the United States, Robert B. Van Valkenburgh, learned of it through the Japanese government official gazette. On 24 May 1868 he issued a memorandum urging that the Japanese government abstain from discriminating against its Christian citizens. He argued that this policy was offensive to Western Christians and that it might bring about deterioration in Japan's international reputation (U.S. Congress, House of Representatives 1869, pt. 1, p. 750; Japan Foreign Office 1938-40, vol. 1, pt. 1, pp. 639-43). That same week the resident ministers of Great

3. An English translation may be found in the U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, *Executive documents, 1868-69* (1869), pt. 1, p. 749.

Britain, France, Prussia, and the Netherlands made similar representations (Japan Foreign Office 1938-40, vol. 1, pt. 1, pp. 643-44, 672-73).

In reply the Japanese government, speaking through Inoue Kaoru, insisted that it could not accept such protests inasmuch as the prohibition of Christianity was a long-established practice of the Japanese government and was, therefore, an internal affair in which interference by foreign powers was prohibited by international law (Inoue Kaoru Kō Denki Hensankai 1933-34, vol. 1, pp. 20-21; Japan Foreign Office 1938-40, vol. 1, pt. 1, p. 847). This reply notwithstanding, the government did slightly modify the language on the notice boards. Christianity continued to be prohibited, but it was no longer called an evil religion (Japan Foreign Office 1938-40, vol. 1, pt. 2, pp. 684-85, 687-88; Japan Cabinet 1867-68, p. 107). This change, however, did not silence the protesting diplomats.<sup>4</sup> Consequently the Foreign Minister, Higashikuze Michiyoshi, issued a statement to the effect that the revised form of the prohibition constituted an admission by the Japanese government that Christianity was not in itself an evil religion and that the change in wording was intended to show official goodwill toward the Western nations (Japan Foreign Office 1938-40, vol. 1, pt. 3, pp. 122-23).

*Internal exile of Japanese Christians by the Meiji government.* By the end of February 1868, the restoration government had extended its control to Kyushu and appointed Sawa Nobuyoshi governor of Nagasaki. Sawa was one of seven court nobles who, in 1863, had attempted a coup d'état for the purpose of restoring imperial rule and, upon its failure, had fled to Chōshū. A rabid leader of the movement to abolish the shogunate and restore ruling power to the emperor, Sawa was also a staunch nationalist.

4. Numerous letters by American, British, and French ministers and consuls protesting the Japanese government's prejudice against Christianity are recorded in the Japan Foreign Office, *Dainihon gaikō monjo* (1938-40).

His staff, consisting of such men as Inoue Kaoru, Matsukata Masayoshi, Ōkuma Shigenobu, and Sasaki Takayuki, shared his nationalistic views and regarded Christianity as contrary to the spirit of the new nation. On arriving at Nagasaki in March 1868, the new governor and his staff immediately revived the policy of persecuting the Japanese Christians in the area (Urakawa 1927, pp. 598–99).

The member of Sawa's staff most active in handling the Christian issue was Inoue Kaoru, but he did not stand alone. Lower-ranking officers who had served the shogunal commissioner of Nagasaki and remained to serve the new governor were fervently committed to persecuting Japanese Christians. Dissatisfied with orders issued during the previous regime instructing them to deal mildly with such criminals, these officers jointly expressed their conviction that Christianity was an evil religion which absolutely could not be tolerated, that belief in Christianity constituted a most serious breach of the law, and that Japanese people admitting to this belief should be severely punished (Anesaki 1926, pp. 109–13; Urakawa 1927, pp. 602–5). These low-ranking officers were the ones mainly responsible for the cruel treatment meted out to Japanese Christians during the years that followed.

The governor of Nagasaki initiated proceedings on 14 March 1868 by issuing a warrant for the arrest of the leaders of the Japanese Christians living in the village of Urakami. On 16 March twenty-two such leaders were interrogated at the office of the governor. Two weeks later, on 29 March, the heads of 180 Christian families were summoned for interrogation. But since the policy of the central government had not yet been decided, both groups were temporarily released even though they admitted their adherence to the Catholic faith (Anesaki 1926, p. 106).

The Grand Council of State met at the Emperor's temporary headquarters in Osaka on 25 April 1868 and discussed the matter of measures to be taken toward confessed Christians. Kido



Takayoshi, influenced by the Chōshū imperialist Yoshida Shōin, held rigidly to the view that the alien religion was something profoundly evil. He proposed beheading the leaders and exiling their followers to other parts of the country. Fukuba Bisei, a senior officer of the minor lord Kamei Korekane and an outstanding Shinto scholar, rejected the idea of capital punishment on the ground that the life of every subject was important and that there might be some possibility of guiding the Japanese Catholics to reaccept the cult of the emperor. Fukuba agreed, however, with Kido's idea of removing the Japanese Christians from their village in order to cut them off from the influence of the missionaries. The Emperor supported Fukuba's view (Inoue 1933-34, vol. 1, pp. 294-95; Urakawa 1928, pp. 506-7).

Consequently on 7 June 1868 the Grand Council of State ordered the governor of Nagasaki to transfer all of the 4,010 Japanese Christians from the village of Urakami to confinement centers to be located in thirty-four feudal domains (Japan Cabinet 1867-68, pp. 126-31). Acknowledging the grave importance of the matter and the need for subtlety in dealing with the consuls of the Western nations, the Grand Council of State also decided to send Kido to Nagasaki to cooperate with the governor in the relocation of the Christians. One and a half months later, on 20 July 1868, the leaders of the Christians were arrested and exiled to the domains of Chōshū, Satsuma, and Tsuwano (Marnas 1897, p. 120).

News of what was transpiring reached the resident foreign representatives through missionaries who had received their information from acquaintances of those being relocated. On 11 July 1868, before the first of the internally exiled Christians had even reached their destinations, the Nagasaki resident consuls of Great Britain, Portugal, the Netherlands, the United States, and France handed a joint communiqué to the governor. In it they expressed deep concern as to the fate of the exiled Christians; they also urged the Japanese government to recognize that since Christianity was the religion of Western coun-

tries, persecution of Japanese Christians solely on account of their acceptance of the Christian faith might be taken by Western peoples as a grave affront. To this communiqué the governor replied on 17 July that since Christianity was forbidden by Japanese law any breach of this law was a punishable offense and that there was no justification for Western powers to intervene in this matter (Japan Foreign Office 1938-40, vol. 1, pt. 2, pp. 835-36, 847-48).

The consuls accordingly referred the matter to their respective ministers in Yokohama for further action. The American minister, Van Valkenburgh, the British Minister, Harry S. Parkes, the French minister, Léon Roches, and the German minister, Max August Scipio von Brandt, took the step of criticizing this action of the Japanese government and demanding its revocation (Japan Foreign Office 1938-40, vol. 1, pt. 1, pp. 802-5; U.S. President 1870, pp. 455-59). To this protest the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Date Munenari, responded congenially. He assured the resident ministers that the local authorities had gone beyond the measures authorized by the central government, that the central government disapproved of acts of cruelty, and that orders to the local authorities to cease their mistreatment of Christians would be issued without delay (Marnas 1897, pp. 136-37). In addition, on 7 August 1868 the Grand Council of State issued an order postponing the internal exile of the remaining Christians (Marnas 1897, pp. 138-40). Date's answer and the government's action undoubtedly satisfied the ministers of the Western powers. The issue appeared to be settled.

As far as available records indicate, however, Date never sent any orders calling for the local authorities to cease their mistreatment of Christians. His assurances must have been merely a crude attempt to calm the ministers. The truth of the matter was that a rebellion, led by the ex-shogunate Admiral Enomoto Takaki, had broken out in Hokkaido and was causing financial and administrative difficulties that made it difficult for the government to transport the large number of Christians into exile

(Anesaki 1926, p. 119; Nezu 1935, p. 98). But since suspension of the relocation plan did not reflect any change in government policy, when the rebellion ended with Enomoto's surrender on 27 June 1869, the Grand Council of State ordered that the exile program be resumed. Seven hundred Catholics of Urakami village were arrested and sent off to exile on 5 and 6 January 1870, and two days later the governor of Nagasaki had sent off from Urakami village to eighteen provinces an estimated 3,000 Japanese Catholics (Anesaki 1926, pp. 121–24; Urakawa 1928, pp. 322–23).

*Western remonstrances and Japanese counterarguments.* Resumption of government-sponsored persecution of Japanese Christians shocked the diplomatic corps and provoked an immediate reaction. Parkes went to Nagasaki to negotiate with the governor, but his attempt was abortive (Marnas 1897, pp. 173–77; Nezu 1935, pp. 98–99; Urakawa 1928, pp. 310–12). He therefore returned to the capital and at once made arrangements for an international conference. A meeting was held on 19 January 1870 with the participation of Prime Ministers Sanjō Sanetomi and Iwakura Tomomi, Foreign Ministers Sawa Nobuyoshi (the former governor of Nagasaki) and Terashima Munenori, and the resident ministers: Ange George Maxime Outrey of France, Charles E. de Long of the United States, Max August Scipio von Brandt of Germany, and Parkes himself representing Great Britain. Parkes strongly reproached the Japanese government for its faithlessness, citing as his justification the statement of Date Munenari sixteen months earlier. Other resident ministers also called on the Japanese government to cease forthwith its persecution of Christian subjects.

This time the Japanese officials reacted strongly. Iwakura and Terashima asserted that the Japanese government was based absolutely on the belief that the emperor was defined as a direct descendant of the Sun Goddess and that because of his divine origin he ruled the country by divine right. Christianity,

they contended, taught the Japanese people to disbelieve and despise this belief; it brought the sacred character of the emperor into contempt. They characterized Christianity as inimical to the spiritual basis of the Japanese polity and claimed not only that the government was obliged to repress Christianity within its borders but also that such repression was strictly a domestic matter.

Terashima, in refuting the Western protest, made yet another point. Calling the ministers' attention to the treaty regulations that guaranteed to foreigners the right to practice their religion at places of worship within the foreign settlements but gave them no right to enter Japanese communities for the purpose of propagating their religion, he accused the foreign missionaries of having violated the treaty agreements not only by inviting Japanese people into the churches within the foreign settlements but also by propagating Christianity outside these settlements. In view of these facts, Terashima observed, sentencing Japanese Christians to internal exile was the only way the government could see that the law was upheld, inasmuch as it did not desire to jeopardize international goodwill by meting out harsh punishments to foreign missionaries (Japan Foreign Office 1938-40, vol. 3, pp. 354-60; U.S. President 1870, pp. 462-68).

Terashima's argument regarding the missionaries' breach of the treaty impressed the ministers. In addition the fact that Japan's most responsible high-ranking officials had expressed their sincere desire for the maintenance of international friendship apparently appeased them. On 9 February 1870 four of the ministers issued memoranda instructing the missionaries to comply with the terms of the treaty by limiting their activities to the foreign settlements (Japan Foreign Office 1938-40, vol. 3, pp. 360-61).

Furthermore, though the ministers were incensed by the news that the Japanese government had resumed the forced internal exile of Christians, they also recognized that this act was closely related to Japan's national security. They understood that a

strong anti-foreign sentiment still dominated the powerful feudal leadership class and that it could easily produce anti-government and anti-foreign movements strong enough to throw the entire country into chaos. They realized that exiling the illegal Christians, despite the protests of the Western powers, was at once a demonstration of the new government's independence from Western interference and a sign of its authority over the most powerful figures lingering on from the preceding era (U.S. President 1870, pp. 468–71). The Western representatives judged that the security of the nation took precedence over the freedom of its Christian subjects, and for the time being they took no further action.

The Japanese government was well aware of the possibility of undesirable consequences and did not carry out further relocations, even though more Christians were discovered while the negotiations were in process and during the following months.<sup>5</sup> It agreed to the British minister's request for permission to send a British officer to inspect conditions at the places of internal exile, and it also sent its own officers to inspect and supervise local authorities so that the treatment accorded the Christians would not be excessively harsh (Japan Foreign Office 1938–40, vol. 4, pt. 2, pp. 741–810). With regard to the issue of relocation, the government and the diplomats from the Christian nations enjoyed, during 1870 and 1871, a period of truce.

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5. In addition to the Urakami Christians near Nagasaki, Christians were discovered and persecuted by the local authorities of the Gotō domain, a cluster of islands west of Nagasaki. On receiving reports of this persecution from missionaries and consuls, the ministers protested to the Japanese government, which sent a special commissioner to investigate the matter. As Gotō could be reached only with considerable difficulty, assessment of the situation and making reports on it were far from simple, so even though a good number of communications were exchanged, the central government long remained ill-informed, and the Western diplomatic corps made its protests with something less than full confidence in the reports of the missionaries (Japan Foreign Office 1938–40, vol. 1, pt. 3, pp. 533–34, 652–65, 905–7, vol. 2, pt. 1, pp. 636–37, 652–67, 715–26, 878–79, 883, vol. 2, pt. 2, pp. 3–21).

*Iwakura mission hindered by the anti-Christian policy.* By early 1871 the new government had resolved most of its domestic problems and began to pay more attention to the international scene. The leaders of the new government were humiliated by the unequal treaties the shogunate had concluded with the Western powers during the 1850s and desired to revise them on equal terms. They also realized the need to strengthen the economic and political foundation of the nation and decided to seek a model of development in the experience of the West. To this end it appointed the Iwakura mission.<sup>6</sup>

Iwakura Tomomi, vice-president of the Grand Council of State and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, headed this mission as Ambassador Extraordinary and Envoy Plenipotentiary. Accompanying him as vice-envoys were several of Japan's most powerful government officials, including Ōkubo Toshimichi, Kido Takayoshi, and Itō Hirobumi. The Iwakura mission left Japan in December 1871, escorted by some fifty subordinates.<sup>7</sup>

The mission first went to the United States. At Washington, between January and June 1872, Iwakura and the vice-envoys discussed the possibility of treaty revision with the United States Secretary of State, Hamilton Fish (Japan Foreign Office 1938-40, vol. 5, pp. 138-41). During these discussions, Fish referred to the persecution of Japanese Catholics by the new government and proposed that the new treaty include an article guaranteeing religious freedom. The Japanese negotiators, however, strongly opposed this suggestion. Kido maintained that the Japanese government had already ceased to treat its Christian subjects harshly, and Iwakura argued that stipulation of religious

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6. Discussions of the mission and its itinerary from the Japanese side are recorded in the Japan Foreign Office publication *Dainihon gaikō monjo* (1938-40), vol. 5, pp. 1-238 and vol. 6, pt. 1, pp. 67-128. An evaluation of the mission from the Western side is given by Mayo, "The Iwakura mission to the United States and Europe, 1871-1873" (1959, pp. 28-47).

7. Mayo (1959, pp. 28-31) vividly describes personalities.

freedom in an international agreement would provide foreign powers with an opportunity to interfere with Japanese politics (Japan Foreign Office 1938-40, vol. 5, pp. 149-50, 161-62). Believing that any treaty provision regarding religious freedom would open the door to foreign intrusion into Japan's domestic affairs, they sought to avoid granting this concession in any new treaty.

Despite the Japanese mission's desire to exclude the religious issue from consideration of what should go into a new treaty, Fish repeatedly insisted that the treaty include a guarantee of religious freedom. He asserted that such a guarantee was one qualification of a civilized nation, and the Japanese delegation finally conceded the point. A treaty draft that Iwakura handed to Fish on 22 April 1872 included a provision that was practically identical with Article 8 of the 1858 treaty. It guaranteed religious freedom for foreigners within the foreign settlements, but did not guarantee religious freedom to the Japanese (Japan Foreign Office 1938-40, vol. 5, p. 176).

The United States side prepared an alternative draft that Fish presented to the Japanese envoys on 8 June 1872. This draft provided that the governments of both nations should respect the religious freedom of both peoples. A second Japanese draft presented to Fish on 10 July adopted this provision (Japan Foreign Office 1938-40, vol. 5, pp. 199, 216).

Instrumental in changing the opinion of the envoys was Mori Arinori, chargé d'affaires at Washington. Thanks to his early education and life in London and his experience in a Swedenborgian community in New York, Mori had a command of the English language and the skill to deal with foreigners (Hall 1965, pp. 56-58, 62, 90, 106). He even wrote his views on religious policy in English, framing them as a recommendation to Prime Minister Sanjō Sanetomi but actually having Western readers in mind. His statement reads in part as follows:

Among the many important human concerns, the one regarding our religious faith appears to be the most vital.

In all the enlightened nations of the earth the liberty of conscience, especially in matters of religious faith, is sacredly regarded not only as an inherent right of man, but also as a most fundamental element to advance all human interests (Mori 1928-30, vol. 11, p. 3).

Though his flamboyant attitude and grandstand plays were detested by Iwakura and Kido, Mori's progressive views came to be regarded positively by Itō and Ōkubo and brought about a change in their opinions (Hall 1965, p. 65).

The reasoning that led to Japanese acceptance of the religious freedom clause is best summarized by Itō (Shunbo Ko Tsuisho Kai 1940-43, vol. 1, p. 654). Having temporarily returned to Tokyo, he attended a cabinet meeting in the presence of the Emperor on 30 June 1872 and there stated that the Americans regarded Japan as a barbaric nation because the Japanese government denied religious freedom by prohibiting its subjects from practicing Christianity and by persecuting those who did so. He observed that the Americans were using this argument as a pretext for not concluding with Japan a treaty based on the principle of equality, and he suggested that if Japan seriously sought to obtain an equal treaty with the United States, it should rescind its policy prohibiting Christianity.

For the sake of gaining an equal treaty, then, the Japanese negotiators reluctantly and unwillingly agreed to a provision guaranteeing religious freedom. But just as the negotiations between the Iwakura mission and the United States Secretary of State were on the verge of completion, the government in Tokyo decided, in view of the most-favored-nation clause in Japan's treaties with the Western powers, that Iwakura should not sign a treaty with the United States alone. Though affirming the full powers of his commission, the government instructed him to organize in Europe an international conference for the purpose of revising all the treaties.

When Iwakura suggested such a conference to Fish, however, the latter objected, saying that the United States would not



sign a treaty between the two nations except at either nation's capital. He rejected the request that the United States join an international conference for treaty revision to be held in Europe (Japan Foreign Office 1938-40, vol. 5, p. 209). Government instructions, therefore, obliged Iwakura not to conclude a treaty with the United States alone, and United States refusal to participate in an international conference prevented the holding of such a conference in Europe. The attempt to negotiate equal treaties with the Western powers thus proved abortive.

Nonetheless, the Iwakura mission crossed the Atlantic. In Europe Iwakura limited himself to courtesy visits to kings and queens, but at meetings with such sovereigns and high-ranking officials, he took advantage of every opportunity to bring up the subject of future treaty revision. On these occasions he did not fail to include in his comments the question of religious freedom and its relation to equal treaties. In answer to his question such dignitaries as the British Chancellor of Foreign Affairs Lord Granville, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs de Remusat, and the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs Gercke d'Herwitjuen unanimously stated that in its attempt to obtain revised treaties Japan was handicapped by the persecution of its Christian subjects (Japan Foreign Office 1938-40, vol. 5, pp. 89-94). Their advice was reinforced by mass demonstrations protesting Japan's persecution of Christians, demonstrations that took place upon the arrival of the Iwakura mission in London, Paris, and the Hague (Japan Foreign Office 1938-40, vol. 6, pp. 90, 587-88, 590).

*Toward toleration of Christianity.* Firsthand observation of the deep concern of Western dignitaries and people over the issue of Christianity did much to change the attitude of the Japanese envoys toward the Christian religion. Even Iwakura, as a result of his meetings with dignitaries in Europe, came to hold the view that in the near future Japan should adopt the principle of religious freedom (Japan Foreign Office 1938-40, vol. 6,

pp. 90, 588, 590).

Responding to this change of attitude on the part of their colleagues in Europe, the remaining cabinet members in Japan became increasingly lenient in regard to Christianity. Minister of Finance Inoue Kaoru, for example, was particularly insistent that the government should adopt a more tolerant policy toward its Christian citizens. In February 1872 he proposed the release of apostatized Christians subjected to internal exile, and by a Cabinet Order of 15 March 1872, about 800 such persons were permitted to return to the village of Urakami and furnished with travel expenses from state funds. Again in August 1872 Inoue urged that the government should release all the relocated Christians, even those who would not forsake their faith, on the ground that they too were Japanese and therefore entitled to humane treatment (Inoue 1933-34, vol. 3, pp. 311-15).

On 24 February 1873 the Grand Council of State finally ordered the removal of the notice boards prohibiting Christianity—though it attached to this order an explanation to the effect that the prohibition of Christianity was already so well understood that further public notice had become unnecessary (Japan Cabinet 1873, p. 64). On 14 March it further ordered the relevant local authorities to release all Christian exiles, and it granted these Christians permission either to return to their home villages or to register as residents at some other location of their own choice (Japan Foreign Office 1938-40, vol. 6, pp. 590-91, 595-98; Japan Cabinet 1873, p. 64).

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 acknowledgment 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.

*Summary and conclusion.* Between 1587 and 1873, a period of nearly three centuries, the ruling power in Japan had proscribed Christianity and persecuted Japanese subjects discovered to be Christian. Hideyoshi, once he had established control over the nation, was the first to declare plainly that Christianity did not conform to Japan's normative syncretistic identity; he accordingly prohibited Japanese people from believing in or practicing this faith on the ground that it would cause public discord. This principle was inherited by the Tokugawas, who rigorously suppressed Christianity throughout the period of Japan's seclusion, and also by the early Meiji leaders, who banished from their home villages a great number of Japanese Christians. The prohibition of Christianity and the persecution of Christians were understood by the Japanese government as necessary measures for maintaining cultural identity and political stability.

In the mid-nineteenth century the Western powers simultaneously overcame the nation's seclusion and attacked Japan's prohibition of Christianity. When Japan was forced to open her ports and entered into unequal treaties with the Western nations, she conceded to foreigners the freedom to practice Christianity within their settlements. Though these treaties, in the Japanese view, prohibited foreign missionaries from carrying activities beyond their settlement boundaries and from conducting missionary work among the Japanese people under any circumstances, their ardor carried them far beyond such limitations. The missionaries, furthermore, received strong support from the Western diplomats who, despite Japanese protests against treaty violations and foreign interference with strictly domestic concerns, persistently remonstrated against the Japanese law prohibiting Christianity and against the severe punishments that fell on those who broke the law. Moreover, when Japan attempted to negotiate treaty revisions with an eye to replacing inequality with equality, the Western officials thwarted this effort. They argued that Japanese government persecution of its Christian citizens was regarded in the West as a

barbaric action, and they used this issue to keep Japan in an inferior position.

Yielding to Western pressure, high-ranking officials gradually became more indulgent toward Christianity during the last days of the shogunate. Seizure of power by the Meiji restorationists put a halt to this tendency, but eventually the Meiji government granted a de facto toleration of Christianity. Its leaders realized that unless they permitted the practice of Christian faith, the Western powers would not acknowledge Japan as a civilized nation or accept her as an equal in the international community.

In the final analysis both the prohibition of Christianity and the repeal of this prohibition reflected, each in its own way, the need for national integrity and international security. When the threat posed by contact with the West was still minor, the prohibition of Christianity, supported by the policy of seclusion, was implemented in order to foster internal harmony. In the mid-nineteenth century, however, when the most ominous threat was not internal discord but the assault of the West, priority was given to international considerations. The policy prohibiting Christianity was rescinded as a concession to the demands of the West. This did not mean, however, that the early Meiji leaders considered it possible to build a stable nation without developing among the people a sense of national identity based on common values. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that these same leaders, in an effort to restore and heighten Japan's cultural identity, subsequently promoted the cult of the emperor.

#### GLOSSARY

Date Munenari 伊達宗城	Hirayama Shōsai 平山省齋
Enomoto Takeaki 榎本武揚	Hotta Masayoshi 堀田正睦
Fukuba Bisei 福羽美靜	Inoue Kaoru 井上馨
Hayashi Hōkō 林鳳岡	Inoue Kiyonao 井上清直
Higashikuze Michitomi 東久世通禧	Itakura Katsushige 板倉勝重
Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤	Itō Hirobumi 伊藤博文

Iwakura Tomomi 岩倉具視  
 Iwase Tadanari 岩瀬忠震  
 Kamei Korekane 亀井茲監  
 Kawaji Toshiaki 川路聖謨  
 Kido Takayoshi 木戸孝允  
 Matsukata Masayoshi 松方正義  
 Mori Arinori 森有礼  
 Oda Nobunaga 織田信長  
 Ōkubo Toshimichi 大久保利通  
 Ōkuma Shigenobu 大隈重信  
 Ōmura Sumitada 大村純忠  
 Ōtomo Sōrin 大友宗麟

Sanjō Sanetomi 三條実美  
 Sasaki Takayuki 佐々木高行  
 Sawa Nobuyoshi 沢宣嘉  
 Terashima Munenori 寺島宗則  
 Tokugawa Hidetada 徳川秀忠  
 Tokugawa Ieyasu 徳川家康  
 Tokugawa Nariaki 徳川斉昭  
 Tokugawa Yoshinobu 徳川慶喜  
 Tokunaga Hisamasa 徳永壽昌  
 Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣秀吉  
 Udono Nagatoshi 鵜殿長鋭  
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