

Secrecy and the Transmission of Tradition Issues in the Study of the “Underground” Christians

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DURING THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY as many as 150,000 for the most part poorly catechized and ill-prepared Japanese Christians went “underground” in response to persecution by the Tokugawa state.¹ The story of these people and their successors—the so-called *kakure Kirishitan* (hidden Christians)—forms a colorful and oft-told part of the early history of Christianity in Japan.² Perhaps as much as two percent of the Japanese population had embraced the Christian faith by 1614, the year the religion was proscribed by the Tokugawa government. Thousands of believers were martyred in the various persecutions that preceded and followed this order, from the time that twenty-six clergy and laypeople were crucified in Nagasaki in 1597 until the final closing of Japan in 1639.³ During the waning years of the Tokugawa period, “after seven generations and more than two-and-a-

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¹ By “state” I mean the *Bakuhau* enterprise comprising the central government (*bakufu*) and domanial (*han*) governments, which, as WHITE has indicated, enjoyed “the defining aspect of the state, that is, the creation of a governmental monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory—in this case, the entirety of Japan” (1988, p. 1).

² Three comprehensive studies in English of the early Christian mission to Japan are the works by BOXER (1951), ELISON (1973), and JENNES (1973). Note that Japanese scholarship on this subject has tended to favor the term *senpuku* (concealed) *Kirishitan* to refer to Christians during the underground phase, and *kakure Kirishitan* to their aboveground successors. In general, English-language scholarship has used “*kakure Kirishitan*” for both.

³ The figures vary widely. JENNES (1973, p. 245) accepts the number 2,126 as a reliable minimum; LAURES (1951, pp. 84–101), by contrast, cites 4,045. Obviously, neither figure includes the approximately 26,800 (GONOI 1990, p. 223) who perished in the Shimabara uprising.

half centuries⁴ of apparent persecution, the underground Christians reemerged. Many rejoined the orthodox church, but others have continued into the present with their clandestine traditions, pseudo-Christian ritual, and unintelligible liturgy, a fascinating story in itself.⁵

In spite of the attention given the underground Christians, however, there remain several issues that have received little attention despite their obvious nature. First, how were the Japanese Christians able to organize themselves into communities that with such remarkable success survived the succeeding centuries of persecution? Second, in what manner did these communities perpetuate their religious traditions? Third, how “Christian” were the underground Christians in 1873, when their persecution officially ended? Finally, how “secret” were these communities, particularly after the executions ceased in 1697? Though this paper attempts to respond to these four questions, it must be acknowledged at the outset that they have remained for the most part unasked because they have no answers, or at best only partial answers. I claim no new “solutions” to these questions, but I do hope to clarify the manner in which currently available data delimit the answers that can be satisfactorily offered. At various points in this paper I also apply some of the theoretical insights of the sociological study of secrecy to these problems, in the hope of throwing new light on certain heretofore enigmatic properties of the underground Christians.

Initial Organization of the Underground Christians

Christians during the period of persecution benefited from the fact that the Christian mission was never without its difficulties even during the time of the state’s relative tolerance of the creed. These difficulties forced the leadership of the Christian mission to devise various coping strategies, and the fruits of these strategies proved invaluable both during the period of intensified persecution and later during the underground phase.

The difficulties came in various forms. First, in its dealings with both the central and domanical governments, the Christian mission

⁴ Those familiar with Japanese and Western scholarship on this subject will recognize the mantra-like qualities of this particular phrasing, which occurs in virtually all studies of the underground Christians.

⁵ For studies in English, see HARRINGTON 1980 and WHELAN 1992. In Japanese the most impressive ethnographic studies currently underway are those by MIYAZAKI Kentarō of Junshin Joshi Tankidaigaku (1988, 1989, 1991, 1992).

suffered from the apparent inconstancy of Japan's military-political leadership. For example, the missionaries were expelled from Kyoto in 1564 by Emperor Ōgimachi, only to be allowed to return in 1569 by Oda Nobunaga; in 1587 the missionaries were again ordered out of Japan by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who then made no effort to enforce his own decree; Tokugawa Ieyasu seemed indifferent towards Christianity, but then issued his Expulsion Edict in 1614, just two years before his own death. The attendant instability forced both the mission itself and those to whom it ministered to be vigilant and ever-prepared for a broad range of untoward outcomes.

The underground Christians also benefited from the mechanisms that the Christian mission devised for coping with its condition of chronic understaffing. At no point did the number of clergy exceed the approximately 137 foreign clerics and seven Japanese priests present in Japan in 1614, and this to minister to a Christian population reliably estimated at 300,000 at its height.⁶ Under ideal circumstances the sacraments central to Roman Catholic theology would have been performed exclusively by these clergymen, but their numbers were never sufficient to make this practicable. The priesthood thus came to depend upon the support services provided by the two offices known as *dōjuku* 同宿 and *kanbō* 看防, both distinctive to the Japan mission.

The position of *dōjuku*, modeled after the Zen monastic position of *jisha* 侍者, was initially devised by Fr. Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606). In 1581 Valignano, who exhorted the foreign clergy to accommodate themselves wherever possible to Japanese customs, described the position of *dōjuku*:

In Japan those who, whether young or old, shave their heads, renounce the world, and promise to devote themselves to the service of the church are called *dōjuku*. Some study to assume the priestly vocation, while others prepare to perform specialized household services such as the office of sacristan, door-keeper, server of the tea ceremony, messenger, assistant at Mass, performer of funerals and baptisms, and attendant to

⁶ The figures for numbers of clergy follow GONOI (1983, pp. 157–58). The figure of 300,000 believers is accepted as a maximum both by LAURES (1954, p. 177), who follows the estimate of Bishop Luis de Cerqueira, and by BOXER (1951, p. 321), who follows the estimate of Valentin Carvalho. KATAOKA (1974, p. 17) believes that there were as many as 450,000–600,000 Christians in Japan at the time. GONOI (1990, p. 12) concludes that the total number of Japanese converts to Christianity, without subtracting for deaths or apostasy, reached 760,000.

the priests on other occasions of the Church. Those who qualify also assist in catechizing, preaching to, and instructing the Christians. These *dōjuku* are respected in Japan and are regarded as clergy. They wear a cassock but one that differs from that of the priests and brothers.⁷

The Jesuit mission had 180 such professional assisting ministers in 1592 and 260 in 1604.

The second office that supported the work of the missionaries was that of *kanbō*, a term taken from Zen terminology where it referred to one who supervises a temple when the chief priest is absent. In some respects, such as their personal appearance (the *kanbō* likewise shaved their heads), their responsibility for congregational instruction and pastoral visitation of the sick or infirm, and their performance of funerals or emergency baptisms, the *kanbō*'s responsibilities overlapped those of the *dōjuku*. In general, however, the *dōjuku* were regarded as senior to the *kanbō* by virtue of the *dōjuku*'s aspirations concerning ordination and the fact that by being allowed to marry, the *kanbō* lived lives that differed less from those to whom they ministered. One might thus regard *dōjuku* as priestly "interns" and *kanbō* as more closely resembling lay ministers. One nineteenth-century source states that there were 170 *kanbō* active in 1603.

It was the *dōjuku* and *kanbō* who took the lead in organizing communities of the faithful after the expulsion of the majority of missionaries in 1614. Although foreign missionaries remained in hiding or disguise in various parts of Japan for nearly three more decades, their numbers were sharply diminished.⁸ Deprived of ordained clergy, the Christian church in Japan came to reflect the characteristics of the ministry initially permitted to the *dōjuku* and *kanbō*. First, since their ministry often took place within the homes of the faithful, the *dōjuku* and *kanbō* established the precedent of ministerial activity removed from ecclesiastic structures, facilitating the transition to the "churchless" clandestine worship and home-based spiritual community of the underground Christians. Second, since only ordained clergy were

⁷ From his *Advertimentos e avisos acerca dos costumes e catangues do Japão*, translated into Italian by Giuseppe F. Schütte (Josef Franz Schütte) as *Il ceremoniale per i missionari del Giappone* (Rome 1946). English translation adapted from that in JENNES (1973, p. 238), according to whom some *dōjuku* also assisted with the composition of instructional manuals for the Japanese, with the printing press, and with the preparation of religious painting.

⁸ As late as 1623, there were still some thirty-three priests in Japan, though by 1638 their numbers were reduced to five. With the probable death of Mantius Konishi in 1644, it is assumed that no ordained clergy survived in active ministry in Japan (SCHÜTTE 1975, p. 1207).

authorized to administer the sacraments (with the exception of baptism, which a lay person may perform in an emergency), the underground church (community of believers) was even less sacramental in character than the aboveground church had been. This, of course, simply perpetuated the tendency to reduce the already diminished sacramental character of the aboveground Roman Catholic mission that had developed in response to the chronic shortage of ordained clergy.

Of the seven sacraments recognized by the Roman Catholic church (baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, extreme unction, holy orders, and matrimony), baptism was the one perpetuated by the underground Christians with the most remarkable fidelity, with the others (except for the Eucharist) being at least approximated. The *dōjuku* and *kanbō* sustained the tradition of baptism, which was recognized throughout the underground period as necessary for salvation. They also devised their own funeral liturgies for abbreviated ceremonies to be performed in haste either immediately before or after the compulsory Buddhist funeral rites. The performance of baptisms and funerals thus remained central to the spiritual life of underground Christians throughout the period of persecution.

The sacraments of confirmation and ordination require the presence of a bishop and so were never significant features of Christian life even during the aboveground “Christian century” (the duties of instruction in the faith were carried out by the *kanbō* and *dōjuku*, who memorized catechisms and trained successors as needed). Similarly, the sacrament of marriage appears never to have been a prominent feature of the spiritual life of most Christians in Japan either prior to or after the persecution, though underground Christians are believed to have used marriages between members of their communities as occasions on which to assemble and share fellowship.

The sacrament of penance (confession and repentance) was more complicated. The forgiveness of sin is central to Christian theology and eschatology, yet confession can only be heard and sins absolved by ordained clergy. Here, the text *Konchirisan no ryaku* こんちりさんのりやく [Essentials of contrition] played a key role, since it contained instruction in how a Christian in Japan might achieve forgiveness of sins through repentance without the presence of an ordained priest to pronounce absolution; this text is discussed in greater detail in the next section.

In addition to the leadership provided by the *kanbō* and *dōjuku* and the theological guidance supplied by catechetical literature, the early underground church benefited both organizationally and com-

munally from the sodalities and confraternities founded by the different Roman Catholic orders in Japan. These organizations varied widely, but they were all essentially support groups established to enhance the sense of community among the faithful and to enable them to minister to each other, particularly as the persecution approached and later intensified. The Sodality of the Blessed Virgin (Santa Mariya no kumi) founded by the Jesuits was by far the largest, although the Franciscans had their Confraternity of the Cord (Obi no kumi) and the Dominicans had their Confraternity of the Rosary (Rosario no kumi).

These organizations made it possible for Christians in Japan to circumvent certain social institutions initiated by the state with the principal aim of uncovering those in violation of its religious policies. For example, by using the network of the sodality urban Christians were able to organize themselves into entire *goningumi* 五人組 (five-household units) thereby subverting the system's intended purpose of mutual surveillance and responsibility. Similarly, the sodalities and confraternities enabled rural Christians, and particularly those in strong concentrations of former aboveground Christian activity, to organize themselves into entire (or near entire) villages, in which the religious organizations reinforced the matrices of interlocking social relationships that so characterized life in the countryside. According to the late KATAOKA Yakichi:

The underground organization of the Christians itself became the social organization of towns and villages, developing a strong closed society in order to sustain the faith and to remain unknown to outsiders. (1974, p. 20)

Thus many of the difficulties faced by the Christian mission to Japan during its aboveground phase proved to be ironic blessings when the communities of the faithful were driven underground. With leadership from the *kanbō* and *dōjuku* and organizational structures based on the models of the sodalities and confraternities, the aboveground church was able to make the transition to underground activity with less trauma than if it had not already been accustomed to a measure of persecution from the authorities. The chronic shortage of clergy likewise made the aboveground church in Japan less dependent upon the priesthood to sustain the traditionally sacramental character of the Roman Catholic church, a feature which again assisted the eventual transition underground.

Keeping the Faith: The Transmission of the Tradition

KATAOKA (1974), TAGITA (1954), FURUNO (1959) and other scholars have divided the underground Christian population into two broad groups: that of the Gotō Islands and Kurosaki (present Sotome-chō) near Nagasaki on the one hand, and that of the islands of Ikitsuki and Hirado on the other.⁹ Regional variations notwithstanding, the various underground Christian communities in Japan shared a number of features that, as we shall see, are characteristic of secret organizations.

Throughout the underground period, the transmission of the tradition was the responsibility of the leadership, itself often divided into areas of overlapping responsibility. Since the underground communities were constructed around secrecy one obviously finds few sources regarding their leadership, but a glimpse of the internal structure of one such group during the late underground phase is provided by the testimony of Hayashi Kichizō, the leader (*chōkata* 帳方) of a community in Urakami who was apprehended in the “Urakami sanban kuzure” anti-Christian sweep in 1856. According to Kichizō:

We call the one who teaches about festival and holy days and the various [forms of] good and evil the *sōgashira* 惣頭; we call the one who handles announcements the *füregashira* 触頭; and we call the one who visits the faithful and ministers to them the *kikiyaku* 聞役. These three assist the *füreyaku* 触役.¹⁰

Even though the terminology used to refer to this leadership structure clearly varied from region to region,¹¹ Kichizō’s testimony is representative of broader tendencies in that it describes how the individual leaders were principally responsible for instruction in the areas of doctrine and ritual, and for the keeping of the calendar among the underground Christian communities of Kyūshū and its nearby islands.

⁹ The principal drawback of this common practice is that it leads one to overlook the underground Christian communities in northeast Japan near Morioka, the urban Christians of Kyoto and Edo, and so on. Unquestionably, however, Kyūshū and its surrounding islands were the principal locus of underground Christian communities during the Tokugawa period and thereafter.

¹⁰ From the *Ishū ikken* 異宗一件 manuscript compiled by the Nagasaki Bugyōsho and located in the Nagasaki Prefectural Library; quoted in KATAOKA 1974, pp. 34–35.

¹¹ For example, the leadership of the Gotō Islands and Kurosaki were generally called *chōkata* 帳方 (leader), *mizukaia* 水方 (baptizer) and *kikiyaku* 聞役, and were collectively known as the *jūyaku* 爺役 (elders); those of Ikitsuki and Hisado were often styled *sazukeyaku* 授け役, *gobanyaku* 御番役, *nibanyaku* 二番役, and *sanbanyaku* 三番役. However, even these most basic terms often varied even between communities separated by relatively short distances.

Furthermore, one may discern in the sacerdotal structure of these communities features that are characteristic of secret societies in general; principal among these is the tension between vertical and horizontal organizational impulses. Since secrecy was necessary for protection among the underground Christians, there was always the need for a strong hierarchical organization to maintain the internal discipline essential to keeping the community's secret and hence insuring its survival. Conversely, it was of utilitarian necessity that areas of responsibility and expertise overlap so that if any member of the leadership were to expire prior to the training of an appropriate successor, as little of the overall tradition as possible would be lost (WOLFF 1950, pp. 356ff.).

The legacy of the sodalities and confraternities was prominent in the process of transmission of the religious tradition from one generation to the next. For example, in 1621 Antonio Janone wrote the *Santa Mariya no Mikumi no Okite* さんたまりやの御組の掟 [Regulations for the (Jesuit) Santa Maria Companhia], one section of which was entitled *Kumigashira no hitobito kokoroe no koto* くみがしらの人々心得の事 [Things the people of the sodality should understand]. In this work (quoted in KATAOKA 1974, p. 32), Janone insisted that "everyone within the *kumi* should know its membership and regulations," attesting to the primacy of mutual recognition and discipline within the underground community. Another apparent (though more localized) legacy of one of the sodalities was the position of *jiyaku* 爺役 (leader) on the island of Ikitsuki, a position believed to have devolved from that of *jihiyaku* 慈悲役 within the Sodality of the Blessed Virgin, an individual described in 1617 by Jeronymo Rodriguez as one "who serves God by assisting his priest and lending direct assistance to his neighbor."¹²

Those who practice their faith in a clandestine manner naturally attach immense importance to the mastery and transmission of the tradition. Among the underground Christians, as mentioned above, the religious tradition was typically transmitted in the form of constituent but at least partially overlapping elements. Although these elements varied regionally in terms of their importance to the religious life of the specific community, the most prominent were generally 1) festivals and their calendar, 2) prayers and liturgies known as *orashiyo* (Latin *Oratio*, Portuguese *Oracio*), 3) objects believed to

¹² From the *Gojōten no Santa Mariya no mikumi* ご上天のさんたまりやの御組, quoted in KATAOKA 1974, p. 39.

have supernatural power or significance, and 4) instruction in the doctrine.

The calendar used in Sotome, the Gotō Islands, and Nagasaki was known as the *Basuchansama no higuri* バスチャンさまの日繰り [the Sebastian calendar], named after Sebasuchan, the most admired Japanese evangelist and martyr in the Sotome region, and apparently the last of the church calendars, which had been printed annually in Japanese from 1590 to 1634. According to local tradition, Sebasuchan learned the methods for converting the solar to the lunar calendar and calculating the dates for movable feasts (e.g., Lent, Easter, etc.) from his own teacher, San Juwan.¹³ The calendar's importance to the underground Christian communities of Sotome, the Gotō Islands, and Nagasaki is attested to by Hayashi Kichizō's testimony quoted above concerning the *sōgashira's* responsibility for designating festival and holy days.¹⁴

Although there were local variations in the determination of the major holy days, the procedure for determining the movable feast of Easter among the underground community in Sotome is representative of the general principles. There, the vernal equinox was reckoned to be the midpoint of Lent; then, the first Sunday after the twentieth day following the equinox was designated Easter; finally, counting forty-six days backward from Easter brought one to the beginning of Lent, or what nowadays is called Ash Wednesday.¹⁵ In addition to the major festivals of Christmas, Easter, and so on, the underground Christians also observed a number of *sawari no hi* 障りの日 (hindered days) on which various kinds of work such as sowing,

¹³ Commenting on the problems posed by the church calendar, Jeronymo Rodriguez wrote, "The Japanese reckon by the lunar calendar and do not reckon by the solar calendar or follow the solar months. Therefore we shall annually convert the solar calendar of holy days, Sundays, and festival days into the lunar calendar, as well as publish a new list of martyrs." From his *Gojoten no Santa Maria no mikumi*, quoted in KATAOKA 1974, p. 92.

According to the legend that arose concerning Basuchan and the calendar, Basuchan served as Juwan's catechist, but Juwan died before he could transmit to Basuchan the correct manner of determining holy days. Basuchan thus fasted for twenty-one days, at the end of which time Juwan appeared to Basuchan in a vision and explained the calendar's subtleties to him. See TAGITA 1954, pp. 168–76.

¹⁴ KATAOKA (1974, p. 92) regards the fact that contemporary kakure Kirishitan communities in Sotome-Gotō-Nagasaki refer to themselves as *chō* 帳 (register) and their leader as *chōkata* 帳方 as further evidence of the calendar's centrality to their ranks.

¹⁵ In the Gotō Islands, Easter was reckoned to be the mid-point of the church year, and all other holidays were calculated by the number of days they either preceded or followed Easter. On Ikitsuki, by contrast, Christmas (called *Gotanjō* on Ikitsuki but *Natara* in the Gotō Islands) was the pivotal date for the calculation of the calendar, Christmas being the Sunday before the winter solstice. See KATAOKA 1974, pp. 93–94, 104–105.

harvesting, fertilizing, and sewing were forbidden. Similarly, in certain areas Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays were days of abstention from poultry and dairy products, unless those days preceded a major holy day or fell during Lent, in which case they were days of complete fasting called *zejun* (from the Portuguese *jejum*).

The pioneering sociologist Georg Simmel observed that “writing is opposed to all secrecy,” but the underground Christians appear to have been dependent upon a number of liturgical and doctrinal texts that were ingeniously concealed and transmitted from generation to generation, but of which not one has survived into modern times.¹⁶ The reason for these texts’ existence, despite the danger they represented, was simple: since many of the *orashiyo* were lengthy and interspersed with Latin and Portuguese words whose meanings were soon lost, a number of these were of necessity written down. In addition to the *Basuchansama no higuri*, the texts believed to have been transmitted in Sotome, the Gotō Islands, and Nagasaki include the aforementioned *Konchirisan no ryaku*, *Tenchi hajimari no koto* 天地始之事 [The beginning of heaven and earth], *Roson no orashio* ロソンのオラシヨ, and the *Jikkajō* 十ヶ条 [Ten articles]. The *Jūikkajō* 十一ヶ条 [Eleven articles] also circulated on Ikitsuki island (KATAOKA 1974, pp. 80–81).

The *Konchirisan no ryaku*, containing instruction for repentance and imploring God’s forgiveness, was transcribed by Bishop Luis Cerqueira in 1603 and printed that same year in Nagasaki. No printed versions survive, but it circulated throughout the period of persecution both orally and in manuscript form in Sotome, Gotō, and Nagasaki (but not in Hirado or Ikitsuki). The prayer is said to have been especially helpful to underground Christians when they visited Buddhist temples or engaged in other activities that apparently compromised their faith, such as the *efumi* 絵踏み, in which the state authorities required people to tread upon any of a variety of sacred Christian images in an attempt to expose hidden Christians. The prayer also functioned as a substitute for the sacrament of extreme unction. Among the other prayers intoned by the underground Christians, the two most common were Japanese translations of the Lord’s Prayer (*Ten ni mashimasu*) and Hail Mary (*Garasa*). Also prominent was the Latin version of the Hail Mary, Ave Maria (*Abe Mariya*), transliterated into Japanese. The fidelity of the transmission of these prayers is discussed in detail in the next section.

¹⁶ WOLFF 1950, p. 352. No Christian museum in Kyūshū is complete without a hollowed-out house beam or a sutra box with secret compartment for concealing liturgical materials.

The *Jikkajō* and *Jūikkajō* were especially important for the transmission of doctrine, since both had circulated widely prior to the start of the persecution.¹⁷ The works, published by the Jesuits, contained concise teachings on the nature of God and the Trinity; Christ and the virgin birth; the immortality of the soul; the ten commandments; the sacraments; Christ's death on the cross, resurrection, and ascension; Christian eschatology; confession and forgiveness; and faith and worship as the means to eternal life. The *Jūikkajō* also included a section on the sacrament of the Eucharist.

The *Tenchi hajimari no koto* was likewise transmitted both orally and in manuscript form, but only in Sotome, the Gotō Islands, and Nagasaki, perhaps because unlike the *Konchirisan no ryaku* it was apparently composed after the intensified persecution of Christians had begun in Ikitsuki and Hirado. The work may be regarded as a kind of pseudo-Christian folk tale that deals in syncretic fashion with the Creation and Fall, the lives of Christ and Mary, and eschatology.¹⁸ This text, too, is discussed in greater detail in the following section.

Objects believed to have supernatural power or significance were called *osugata* お姿 (a translation of the Portuguese *imagem*) in Sotome, the Gotō Islands, and Nagasaki, and *nandogami* 納戸神 (lit. "closet kami") in Ikitsuki and Hirado. These may be roughly categorized as follows: sacred objects from the pre-persecution era, such as crosses, medallions, rosaries, paintings; garden lanterns (*tōrō* 燈籠); Buddhist statues, particularly the so-called "Mariya Kannon"¹⁹; calendars, *orashiyo* and other written materials; pieces of cloth (often placed between the hands of the deceased at burials); and mirrors. These objects represent the principal material legacy of the underground phase of the Christian history in Japan.

One distinctive feature of the nontextual material culture of the underground Christians is that it was, in general, visually indistinguishable from nonproscribed objects of everyday use associated with the Buddhist and eclectic folk religious traditions. What distinguished

¹⁷ Janone's *Santa Mariya no mikumi no okite* recommended the latter to the membership of the sodality for memorization.

¹⁸ Annotated texts of *Tenchi hajimari no koto* may be found in TAGITA (1954, pp. 83–163) and EBISAWA (1970, pp. 382–409).

¹⁹ Note that the underground Christians apparently never used this term to refer to statues of Kannon, or Kannon with child. In a listing of materials confiscated from discovered Christians, the author of the Nagasaki Bugyōsho's *Ishū ikken* lists "the female Buddha embracing a child which are their Hanta Maruya [sic] with the infant Jizōsu [sic]." Quoted in KATAOKA 1974, p. 45.

most of these objects to underground Christians was only the fact that they were of ritual or symbolic import to their communities, and so only rarely were underground Christians uncovered through discovery of their religious possessions. A story told by the Nagasaki Dutch interpreter Narabayashi Jūhyoe Takahiro illustrates the similarity of much Buddhist and Christian imagery:

Jūhyoe was escorting a Dutchman to Edo. One day as he was walking with the Dutchman midway along their route, they encountered a Buddhist pilgrim who bore on his back a statue of Koyasu Kannon [Kannon and child], and the puzzled Dutchman asked, “This deity is also worshiped in Japan?” When Narabayashi explained that this was a Buddhist statue called Koyasu Kannon, the Dutchman said that this religious statue is also a statue of his religious founder (*kyōshū*), Maakude Mariya [sic].²⁰

One of the values of Narabayashi’s story is that it reveals a fundamental feature, born of necessity, among the underground Christian communities: for their disguise to work, the material elements of that disguise had to be indistinguishable to an outsider from the objects of Japanese Buddhism and folk religion. This feature, too, is characteristic of secret societies, for as Georg Simmel observed, “Of all protective measure, the most radical is to make oneself invisible” (WOLFF 1950, p. 345). This is precisely what the transparent “disguise” of the underground Christians’ nontextual material culture accomplished. However, this disguise would in turn retain its meaning only so long as it remained secondary to the tradition and was not confused with the primary substance of the underground creed. The extent to which the underground Christians were successful in sustaining this distinction is the subject of the next section.

The Fidelity of the Transmission

There is a beautiful story of how a small group of underground Christians from Urakami introduced themselves to the French missionary Fr. Bernard-Thadée Petitjean on 17 March 1865 at the Ōura church in Nagasaki.²¹ That day, as he recalled in two letters written

²⁰ From the *Narabayashi zatsuwā* 榎林雑話 in the *Kaihyō sōsho* 海表叢書, kan 3, quoted in KATAOKA 1974, pp. 43–44.

²¹ The story can be found in any number of sources, but the earliest is MARNAS 1897, 1, p.487 ff. Marnas relied upon two letters by Fr. Petitjean dated 18 March 1865 (to Fr.

shortly after the event, Petitjean saw a group of twelve to fifteen men, women, and children standing in front of the locked door to the church. After he unlocked the door for them, they followed him as a group to the main altar where he was praying, and eventually three of the older women knelt beside him and whispered, "The heart of all of us here is the same as yours.... At Urakami, nearly all have the same heart as we have" (MARNAS 1897, 1, p. 488). During the following months some thirteen hundred underground Christians from Urakami and an equal number from nearby mountain communities presented themselves to Petitjean and his missionary colleagues, a reunification of members of the underground Christian communities with the Roman Catholic church that brought immense joy to all involved and particular gratification to the missionaries.

As it happens, however, not all (and probably not more than one-half) of the underground Christians chose to rejoin the Roman Catholic church. The stated reasons for the decision of some to remain apart were varied, but whatever the actual reasons it is clear that what was in the "hearts" of many of the mid-nineteenth-century "Christians" was fundamentally at variance with that which was in the hearts of those missionaries who represented the underground communities' initial point of contact with the presumed church of their ancestors.

That the church itself had changed is obvious. The earlier sixteenth- and seventeenth-century missionaries were generally of Portuguese and Spanish descent and had for the most part a healthy respect and even admiration for the culture and mores of the people whom they were sent to evangelize. By contrast, the earliest nineteenth-century missionaries were French and were perceived, justly or not, to have little regard for Japanese culture, viewing themselves as representatives of a more advanced society and civilization.

Nothing is more problematic in the study of the underground Christians than the question of how similar in fact were the "hearts" of the Urakami and other professed Christians in mid-nineteenth century Japan to the "hearts" of their seventeenth-century forebears. How faithfully, in other words, had the tradition been transmitted and received over seven generations? The mid-nineteenth-century Christians sincerely believed themselves to be the legitimate heirs of a centuries-old transmission, of course, and there is the possibility that they may indeed have faithfully transmitted understandings that were

initially flawed—Christianity was, after all, an alien and complex creed for both them and their ancestors. Further, lest there be any doubt, no evidence concerning what the Christians believed—no matter how convincing—may be construed to answer the question of what lay in their hearts, and the evidence concerning their faith, such as it is, is itself conflicting. Nonetheless, even though no certain answers to these questions exist, a review of the major arguments for both sides of the various issues should still be helpful.²²

Virtually all scholars agree that some parts of the tradition were transmitted with almost incredible fidelity. For example, the Urakami Christians are recorded as having asked many questions that March day in 1865, with one woman remarking:

We celebrate the feast of our Lord Jesus (*On aruji Jesus sama*) on the twenty-fifth day of the month of frost. We have been told that on that day, about midnight, our Lord was born in a stable, that he grew up in poverty and suffering, and that at the age of thirty-three he died for the salvation of our souls on the cross. Now we have the season of sorrow (*kanashimi no setsu*) [Lent]. Do you also have these celebrations? (MARNAS 1897, 1, p. 489)

Fr. Petitjean replied that the Roman Catholic church was itself seventeen days into the season of Lent, and both he and his colleagues were struck by the longevity of the church's calendar of holy days among the underground Christians.

For their part, the underground Christians were at least as interested in testing the authenticity of the missionaries as the missionaries were in learning about their new flock. For example, when "Pierre," the *mizukata* (baptizer) of Kaminoshima, visited the Ōura church some two months after the initial contact, he tested the authenticity of the priests he met by inquiring whether they acknowledged "the great chief of the Kingdom of Rome," and whether they had children. Only their correct answers to these questions convinced him that these priests were the genuine successors to those who had instructed his forebears in the faith (MARNAS 1897, 1, pp. 511–12).

Fr. Petitjean and the other French missionaries observed with satisfaction that many of the still-underground Christians had quite sound understandings of the Trinity, the Immaculate Conception, the com-

²² Particularly since there exists an awkward silence on this issue, as if the question were too impolite to raise among those sympathetically disposed toward the plight of the underground Christians.

mandments and prayers, and eschatology, though they also recognized that in many areas what the priests regarded as basic doctrinal knowledge was seriously limited among the laity (MARNAS 1897, 1, pp. 510, 523). There were also problems from the church's point of view concerning the validity of some baptisms and most marriages, as well as what the missionaries regarded as the eccentric funeral practices of the *mukashi* Kirishitan, or "old Christians" as some of their fold now styled themselves (JENNES 1973, p. 219).

Lest the overwhelmingly promising testimony of the French missionaries be dismissed as simply another example of the foreign clergy in Japan misperceiving reality for what they hoped to discern, there is evidence to support the impression of the centrality of baptism to the spiritual life of underground Christians. For example, the official 1806 report concerning the underground Christians in Amakusa asserts that when they baptize they "prepare water for their revered Deusu and recite spells; the child receives the sign of the cross upon the forehead and is made to drink this water; and they give [the child] a different name in addition to the [child's] regular name" (ANESAKI 1925, p. 303). From this and from the observation of missionaries throughout Japan, it is clear that of the seven sacraments of the Roman Catholic church, baptism was transmitted with the greatest care and fidelity.

Similarly, the birth of Jesus was a major holy day in all communities of underground Christians, even if it was not always clear why this Jesus was central to their ancestors' creed. Again quoting from the testimony of Kichizō:

Each year near the time of the winter solstice, there is a day called *Natariya* on which Riusu [mistaken transcription of Zezusu] was born. While Hanta Maruya was wandering, she gave birth in a stable and drew warm water from a manger, and for this reason it is a special holy day.

That some of the flavor of local *matsuri* had influenced the celebration of such holy days is likewise clear: Kichizō is also quoted as having declared that on both the night before Christmas (called *togi*) and on the day itself, fresh fish and sake are placed before the Buddha, and the family stays up all night; the Garasa (Hail Mary) is recited in sets of thirty-three invocations; and in households that raise cattle, the animals are given rice or barley to eat (KATAOKA 1974, p. 100).

Nowhere is the penetration into the underground Christians' tradition of motifs from the surrounding religious environment more

dramatically demonstrated than in the text of *Tenchi hajimari no koto*. At what point the extensive Japanese folk elements entered the tale's transmission, and the extent of variation from one region's version to another, are issues that remain unresolved.²³ What is clear, however, is that the work in all extant versions intersperses elements of Japanese folk religion with such fundamental elements of the Christian narrative as the story of the Garden of Eden and the Fall; the flood; the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus; and stories concerning the end-time.

One example from among many that might be cited represents *Tenchi hajimari no koto*'s variant of the well-known story of Noah and the ark. The text describes how when persons in ancient times became too numerous on earth, Deusu (God) warned Pappa-Maruji (Pope-martyr) that the earth would be destroyed by waves if the eyes of the *shishi* (temple-guardian dogs) should ever turn red. Alas, young children overheard Deusu's warning and as a prank painted the *shishi*'s eyes red. When Pappa-Maruji saw this, he wasted no time putting his six children in a dugout canoe, and they survived the flood. They together arrived at the island of Ariō, but the souls of those tens of thousands of others who all perished in the flood instead went to Benbō (limbo).²⁴

Kataoka has written that even as the very exclusivity of the underground experience reinforced the strict adherence to traditional norms and practices, it also invited stagnation, so that it became possible for the underground Christians to retain certain traditional practices virtually unchanged over time even after the import of those practices had long been forgotten. In this regard, KATAOKA has also argued that the underground Christians' adoption of Buddhism as a disguise to conceal their practice of the proscribed creed became itself problematic, and that with the passage of time the disguise became a ritualized reality that lost its original import and meaning (1974, p. 85).

It is clear that in certain instances it was precisely this combination

²³ This work has an exceedingly complicated textual history. The version given to Fr. Petitjean by Fukahori Zen'uemon in 1865, and whose doctrinal errors Fr. Petitjean found unimportant (MARNAS 1897, 1, p. 505), was lost in the 1874 fire that destroyed the Yokohama Mission. Johannes Laures regarded this as most likely different from any of the eight versions of the text that Tagita Kōya obtained in 1931–1938. See LAURES 1957, p. 116.

²⁴ EBISAWA 1970, pp. 386–87. Although patriots like Hirata Atsutane took pride in what they believed to be the absence of a native flood myth in Japan, KAMIYA Takehiko (1986, pp. 86–89) has identified a myth in western Kyūshū of a catastrophic *tsunami*.

Chart 1. Fidelity of Transmission of the Lord's Prayer in Separate Communities

	<i>Dochirina (1600)</i>	<i>Sotome orasho</i>	<i>Ikitsuki</i>
1	<i>Ten ni mashimasu warera ga onoya</i>	<i>Ten ni mashimasu warera ga mioya</i>	<i>Ten ni mashimasu warera ga ono oya</i>
2	<i>Mina o tattomaretamae</i>	<i>Mina mitattamaitai</i>	<i>Mina mo tachitomaitamaite</i>
3	<i>Miyo kitaritamae</i>	<i>Mi ni kitoi tamau</i>	
4	<i>Ten ni oite oboshimesu mama</i>	<i>Ten ni oite wa oboshimesu mama</i>	<i>Ten ni oite mo omoshimeshi mama</i>
5	<i>Naru gotoku chi ni oite mo</i>	<i>Naru gotoji ni oite wa</i>	<i>Narugotoku uchi ni oite mo</i>
6	<i>Arasetamae. Warera ga</i>	<i>Arasetamau. Warera</i>	<i>Mawarasetamaiya. Warera ga</i>
7	<i>Hibi no onyashinai o konnichi</i>	<i>Hibi no onyashinai konnichi</i>	<i>Hibi no onyashinai konnichi</i>
8	<i>Warera ni ataetamae</i>	<i>Warera ni ataetamau</i>	<i>Warera ni ataetamau</i>
9	<i>Warera hito ni yurushi mōsu gotoku</i>	<i>Warera hito ni yurushi mōsu goto</i>	<i>Warera wa hito ni yurushimasu gotoku</i>
10	<i>Warera ga toga o yurushitamae</i>		<i>Warera ga toga mo yurushitamaeya</i>
11	<i>Ware o tentasan ni</i>	<i>Warera Tentō ni</i>	<i>Warera ga teitosan ni</i>
12	<i>Hanashitamau koto nakare</i>	<i>Hanashitamau koto nakare</i>	<i>Hanashitamau koto naka mo</i>
13	<i>Ware o kyōaku yori</i>	<i>Kyō yori aku o</i>	<i>Warera ga kyūaku yori</i>
14	<i>Nogashitamae amen.</i>	<i>Nugashitamau koto amen zeusu.</i>	<i>Nogashitamaiya anmei zosu mariya.</i>

of preserved form and lost meaning that invited distortion in the transmission. For example, the early prayers of the underground Christians combined Latin and Portuguese, exactly as these prayers had initially been taught to the Christians by the foreign missionaries. But since the meaning of the foreign words and sentences was soon forgotten, errors easily crept into the recitations, as in the example of the phrase *yōkashichiya* (lit. “eight days seven nights”), which was a near-homophonic but nonetheless mistaken transcription for the word *yūkarisucha* (Eucharist) (KATAOKA 1974, pp. 20–21).

That the transmission of prayers and their inherent doctrine was accomplished with greater fidelity when the prayers were originally learned in Japanese is easily demonstrated. Compare the fidelity of the transmission of the Lord’s Prayer in the utterly separate communities of Sotome and Ikitsuki with the original Japanese printed in 1600 in Nagasaki (KATAOKA 1974, pp. 61–62). The accuracy with which the Lord’s prayer was preserved and transmitted is impressive and doubtless related to the early translation of the prayer into Japanese (see chart 1 on previous page).

When prayers were not translated, however, such as the Ave Maria, they fared less well. Compare the following versions of the prayer, which was available to some Japanese Christians only in its Latin version (KATAOKA 1974, p. 63):

Latin	Ikitsuki	Gotō Islands
1 <i>Ave Maria gratia plena</i>	<i>Ame Mariya karassa binno</i>	<i>Abe Mariya kashiyabēna</i>
2 <i>Dominus tecum benedicta</i>	<i>Dōmisu terikobintsu</i>	<i>Domejako kobenaddo</i>
3 <i>tu in mulieribus et</i>	<i>Tsūwaeshi moedebesu esu</i>	<i>Tsuimonarentsu kurontsu</i>
4 <i>benedictus fructus</i>	<i>Berentsu furutsu</i>	<i>Benekentsu onha</i>
5 <i>ventris tui Jesus</i>	<i>Bentsūtsutsu intsu</i>	
6 <i>Sancta Maria Mater Dei</i>	<i>Santa Mariya birigobātende</i>	<i>Santa Mariya rakurandonba</i>
7 <i>Ora pro nobis</i>	<i>Ura deura nobesu</i>	<i>Dengen dōri</i>
8 <i>peccatoribus</i>	<i>Bekaribesu</i>	
9 <i>nunc et in hora</i>	<i>Nonkitsunoshiriya</i>	<i>Nan kirimonya</i>
10 <i>mortis nostrae</i>	<i>Mōntsurushinōshitsurushi</i>	
11 <i>Amen</i>		<i>Amen jozu</i>

Despite the obvious distortion and loss of meaning, it is nonetheless remarkable how closely the largely nonsense syllables of the Ikitsuki and Gotō versions of the prayer conform to the Latin original. While it is generally believed that the transmission of the liturgical and scriptural tradition was hindered by the fact that the underground Christians were for the most part agriculturists or fishermen (as opposed to samurai or others who were more likely to be literate),

it is equally plausible that the transmission by illiterates—in an environment where the possession of proscribed texts could be fatal—may have been an ironic advantage.

Returning to the original question of how faithfully the tradition was transmitted from one generation to the next (the question of, in other words, what was “in the hearts” of the Urakami and other Christians in the mid-nineteenth century), it should be obvious that this is ultimately unanswerable. Professional church workers of every creed will attest to the fact that the degree of doctrinal understanding and strength of conviction varies not just from one region or community to the next, but also within communities of the faithful and of course even within individuals at different stages of their lives. That some underground Christians in the mid-nineteenth century had impressive knowledge of a broad range of doctrine, church calendar, liturgy, and prayer is inarguable; that in certain circles the creed had been indigenized to the point of being no longer Christian is similarly beyond reasonable dispute.²⁵

The Degree of Secrecy

The question of the degree of actual secrecy maintained by the underground Christians is in many ways just as problematic as the question of the fidelity of their transmission. Obviously, Christian communities in Japan initially went underground and sought to perpetuate the tradition of their ancestors in a clandestine manner in order to protect themselves from the Bakuhan state. This state, as is well known, persecuted Christians in an intense manner for much of the seventeenth century and “uncovered” underground Christians on a number of occasions during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Nevertheless, two fundamental questions have remained for the most part unasked in studies of the underground Christians. First, how serious was the state about uncovering and persecuting Christians? Second, how secret were the underground Christians?

I have written elsewhere regarding the first question, at least as it applies to state policy in Japan toward religion through much of the seventeenth century, and have argued that early on (and certainly by the 1660s) the Bakuhan state understood that despite its success in controlling what people do or say, it was ultimately unable to control

²⁵ The problematic “being...Christian” is here understood as belief in the tenets of either of the ancient (Apostles’ and Nicene) creeds.

what they think or believe. I further argue that as a result one observes a renewed emphasis by the state on methods for insuring no more than nominal compliance with its religious policy. These methods included the *terauke* 寺請 temple registration system, the *shūmon aratame* 宗門改 inquisition, the *goningumi* mutual responsibility system, and—specifically against the Christians—the *efumi*, or forced desecration of items sacred to Christianity.²⁶

That the Bakuhan state through most of the eighteenth century was largely indifferent to the uncovering of Christians is suggested by the fact that there was not a single instance of anti-Christian persecution during the near-century from 1698 to 1789, and by the abolition of the Office of Inquisition in 1792. One cannot deny that from 1790 until the end of the Tokugawa period there were several instances in which Christians were exposed and persecuted, as, for example, in Urakami in 1790–1791 and again in 1792–1794; in Amakusa in 1805–1806; in Osaka in 1827–1829; and again in Urakami in 1840–1841, 1856–1860, and 1867.²⁷ Yet an analysis of these incidents supports the view that Bakuhan officials were generally less than aggressive in their enforcement of the anti-Christian edicts.

For example, the incident that led to the uncovering of thousands of Christians in 1805 in the four villages of Ōe, Imatomi, Sakitsu, and Takahama, all near Amakusa, was of so outrageous a character that it obviously could not have been overlooked by the local authorities. In that year some peasants in Imatomi killed a cow and offered its meat and blood as an offering before the local Buddhist altar, and as a result some 5,200 Christians were “uncovered.”²⁸ Because Amakusa had been the site of the former Jesuit *collegio* it was supposed to be subject to heightened surveillance, making it quite implausible that the actual faith and religious practice of over five thousand individuals in four villages could have been unknown either to the local authorities or to the priests of those temples at which these underground Christians satisfied the requirements of the *terauke* system.

Nor were the Amakusa communities the only sizable groups of underground Christians in Japan. For example, the three villages of Motohara, Ieno, and Nakano contained over seven hundred house-

²⁶ See my “Keeping the faith: Religious policy and privacy in seventeenth-century Japan,” forthcoming.

²⁷ See ANESAKI 1925, p. 299. The persecution continued into the Meiji period in Urakami and the Gotō Islands during the period 1868–1872.

²⁸ For a detailed description of the 1805 incident and its aftermath, see FURUNO 1959, pp. 46–87.

holds of underground Christians, all of whom were under the spiritual guidance of the Hayashi family of *chōkata* in the Sato district of Urakami (KATAOKA 1974, p. 25); Fr. De Rotz estimated that there were some eight thousand Christians in Sotome when he arrived in the late 1860s;²⁹ it is estimated that there were five to six thousand Christians in Amakusa and Sakitsu in the 1860s;³⁰ and Fr. Prudence Girard estimated that there were some twenty thousand Christians in some forty to fifty communities in and near Nagasaki.³¹ The scale of these communities was such that official ignorance concerning their spiritual life was similarly improbable.

There are several possible explanations for why representatives of the Bakuhan state may have taken a relaxed approach to the enforcement of the anti-Christian policies. First of all, for an official to uncover a sizable underground community at any time other than the start of a new position would inevitably represent something of an embarrassment, since such communities obviously could not have sprung up overnight. Their existence would thus have been *de facto* evidence that either the official or his predecessor had been derelict in the exercise of their responsibilities.

After the discontinuation of bounties for turning in Christians, people no longer had any meaningful incentive to reveal their suspicions concerning neighbors to the authorities. At times, in fact, there were good reasons for *not* doing so. For example, when thousands of underground Christians emigrated from Ōmura to the Gotō Islands at the invitation of the islands' daimyo Gotō Moriyuki (1752–1809), not a single one was uncovered during the process of moving, even though the islands had acquired the symbolism of a virtual promised land for Ōmura Christians (see WHELAN 1992, pp. 382–83). The daimyo was in desperate need of agriculturist settlers, and evidence suggests that the underground Christians of Ōmura were precisely the type of excellent citizens—productive yet inconspicuous—that any daimyo in need of agricultural workers would appreciate. Hence not only was there essentially no incentive for turning such persons in, there was also considerable economic and social *disincentive* for doing so. And of course, power (in the form of control) inevitably accrues to those who comply in concealing knowledge of another's

²⁹ According to materials in the Rekishi Minzoku Shiryōkan and Doro Shinpu Kinenkan, Sotome.

³⁰ According to Mr. Nishikido Hiroshi, curator of the Kyōdo Shiryōkan, Amakusa.

³¹ From a letter dated 5 August 1865, quoted in MARNAS 1897, 1, p. 537n.

transgressions (TEFFT 1980, p. 36).

Whether or not the underground Christians were actually as successful as they imagined themselves to be in exercising their faith in a clandestine manner, it is clear that secrecy itself had become integral to their religious praxis, as, some have argued, secrecy is to religion in general.³² The sociologist Georg Simmel was apparently the first to observe that the dynamics of individual secrecy and group secrecy differ utterly, for in the former the emphasis is on the external "relationship between the one who has the secret and another who does not," but in the latter the emphasis becomes overwhelmingly internal as "the secret determines the reciprocal relations among those who share it in common" (WOLFF 1950, p. 345). Such secrecy had become part of the fabric of life in the "deep cover" (*fukaku kakure*) of the underground Christians' communities, as even the Bakufu recognized as early as 1664 (MURAI 1987, p. 73).

Conclusion

Engelbert KAEMPFER, a German physician employed from 1690–1692 by the Dutch factory on Deshima in Nagasaki harbor, had the following to say about the Christian mission in seventeenth-century Japan:

Considering what a vast progress it had made till then, even amidst the many storms and difficulties it had been exposed to, there was very good reason to hope, that within a short compass of time the whole Empire would have been converted to the faith of our Savior, had not the ambitious views, and impatient endeavors of these Fathers, to reap the temporal, as well as the spiritual fruits of their care and labour, so provoked the supreme Majesty of the Empire as to raise against themselves and their converts, a persecution which had not its parallel in History, whereby the Religion, they preach'd, and all those who profess'd it, were in a few years time entirely exterminated. (1906, vol. 2, p. 2)

Despite his excellence as an observer and rapporteur, there are at least three problems with Kaempfer's comments. First, there was never meaningful danger that the whole of Japan would convert to Christianity, for even after decades of relatively unhindered mission

³² "Not only is there no religion without secrecy, but there is no human existence without it" (BOLLE 1987, p. 1).

no more than two percent of Japan's population had embraced the creed. Second, as tragic as it was, the scale of persecution of the Christian mission ultimately pales in comparison to the loss of life that occurred when the Buddhist fortresses of Mt. Hiei and the Ishiyama Honganji were razed in the sixteenth century by Oda Nobunaga during the process of national unification. And third, neither the Christian creed itself nor those who professed it were successfully "exterminated" despite two-and-a-half centuries of systematic persecution.³³

Despite the fact that the prohibition and persecution of Christianity is one of the few policies that ran through virtually the entire Tokugawa period (MURAI 1987, p. 7), the Bakuhan state was singularly ineffective in the enforcement of its stated anti-Christian policy. Tens (if not hundreds) of thousands of Christians continued to defy the state by sustaining the traditions, practices, and creed of their forebears, veiling it in Buddhist folk religion and for the most part outwardly living the lives of near-model citizens.

But these seemingly model citizens were unconsciously engaged in a profoundly subversive and utterly defiant activity. As TEFFT (1980, p. 67) has observed, secrecy enables "the weak to escape coercion by the powerful and to oppose them." The secret thus has both empowering and protective properties to it: it is empowering in that, quoting from Georg Simmel (WOLFF 1950, p. 330), it brings about the "possibility of a second world alongside the manifest world," a world whose spirituality in this case was not confined to religious edifices but rather permeated the homes, and many of the everyday objects within, of otherwise ordinary folk; and it is protective because, as discussed previously, in its most radical form as practiced by the underground Christians, its disguises involved the ultimate defense of invisibility (WOLFF 1950, p. 345). The underground Christians in this respect resembled other practitioners of underground religious movements during the Tokugawa period, such as the clandestine *nenbutsu* groups that arose within splinter True (Shin) Pure Land communities during the eighteenth century (OGURI 1974, pp. 210–13, 228–33).

The underground Christians' antitextual orientation, their subversive good citizenship, their use of commonplace objects for religious purposes, their peculiarly complex hierarchy, and their division of responsibility are all characteristic properties of secret communities. As Simmel was the first to observe,

³³ As KAEMPFER knew well. See 1906, 2, pp. 85–86.

Secret societies, above all others, carry through the division of labor and gradation of their members with great finesse and thoroughness.... [For,] by virtue of it, organically instinctive forces are replaced by a constantly regulating will; and growth from within is exchanged for constructive purposiveness. (WOLFF 1950, p. 356)

Thus the overlapping responsibilities that characterized the leadership of underground Christian communities insured continuity in the transmission of the tradition, while the communities' hierarchical structures and specificity of function promoted a corporate style of self-governance in which the needs of the collectivity were accorded the highest priority. Much the same applies to the apparent passion for formalism—even at the expense of loss of meaning—among the underground Christians. So strong is this predilection within secret societies that Simmel wrote (WOLFF 1950, p. 358) that there “are perhaps no other traits which are so typical of the secret society, and so sharply distinguish it from the open society.” For it is only within an open society that the members ever enjoy the luxury of asking why a practice is upheld, or what meaning underlies an action, whereas in an underground community the secrecy itself has become a self-sufficient source of meaning. In this context, that *any* classically Roman Catholic meaning adhered within the ritual structures of underground Christian communities is all the more impressive.³⁴

The underground Christians of Tokugawa Japan were in all likelihood neither as secret as they imagined themselves to be, nor as faithful to the teachings and practices of their ancestors as they aspired to be. And yet, their discipline and cohesion enabled them to defy an absolutist government for two-and-a-half centuries. For the overall fidelity of their transmission, they merit our admiration; for what they dared, they inspire our wonder; and it is ultimately their survival in which we discern the true measure of their spiritual accomplishment.

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³⁴ As opposed to ENDŌ Shūsaku's metaphor of Japan as a religious “swamp,” used in numerous works but most recently in 1992, pp. 144–211.

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