

Kirishitan and Today

Shusaku Endo , 1992



Xavier arriving in Japan

I was baptized a Catholic, while still a small boy. To be precise, I was forcibly baptized. So I am not like other Christian writers. Before becoming a Christian, I had no deep thoughts, nor did I compare and contrast the teaching of Christianity with other ideas. In other words, I did not choose Christianity as in choosing a lover; but I accepted it as in accepting a bride chosen by my parents. When I was a student, I often told this bride that we should be divorced; but she would not consent to it. So I had to go on with my married life.

I had two reasons, as a writer, for being interested in the Kirishitan period. Needless to say, I am no historian or expert in Kirishitan studies. I am unable to read Spanish or Portuguese, but I have to rely on books translated into Japanese or on books written in French. Still, in my youth Japan was forced into war; and as Christianity was regarded as the religion of our enemies, Christians were oppressed in various ways. Sophia University, too, where we are now gathered, was oppressed as being a Christian university. I have heard about this from many people, including some of the older fathers. They were watched by the military and the police, and endured unpleasant, even bitter experiences that almost amounted to persecution.

Soon after my baptism, a French father who had been very kind to me was caught by the police and subjected to bitter torture till the end of the war. When the war ended, he came back thin and worn-out. In his first Mass after his return, he only said, "I will never detest the Japanese people." Nothing more. And for the rest of his life he never mentioned this incident again. Just before he died, I had the chance to see him. The people of our church knew it was a wound inflicted on him during his torture that had ruined his health and was now causing his illness.

So for me the period of Kirishitan persecution is not in a distant past, but is the archetype of experiences I have had in actual life. So from the beginning I was interested in the Kirishitan period. Fortunately, I have been able to spend most of my life in a Japan that is now at peace, where there is freedom of worship. But recalling my experience during the war, I can't help asking myself the question, "If I had been living in Japan during the persecution, what would I be thinking, and how would I be living?"

This is similar to the question of whether I am a strong or a weak man; and it is connected with the other question of what it means to me to be a novelist. What led me to this question was the story of our Japanese ancestors in the Kirishitan period, from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century.

Moreover, as a Japanese, I have always felt a sense of incompatibility with westernized Christianity--not so much Christianity itself as that form of Christianity which has hardened under western influence. So I couldn't help wondering how my ancestors, the Kirishitan of the sixteenth and the seventeenth century, had accepted this form of Christianity. So while there are Japanese writers who use the Kirishitan period as material for their novels, for me this subject is no exoticism but a pressing problem concerning my faith and my way of life.

Similarly, there is a considerable gap between Japan's acceptance of western culture in the Meiji period and her first acceptance of it in the sixteenth and the seventeenth century. In the Meiji period Japan overlooked the essential aspect of the West and only chose those things which were practical, which could be put to immediate use. In other words, Japan only received aspects of civilization. But comparing this with what Japan received in the Kirishitan period, one finds the difference between civilization and culture.

It was during the Kirishitan period that Japan first received the direct influence from the West; but it was during the Meiji period that Japan had the chance to select between what she considered necessary and what was more suitable for her, and she discarded what she could not accept. Thus it was that in the Kirishitan period a great amount of blood was shed and innumerable people died, but in the Meiji period there was hardly any incident of people dying for this reason.

Now as a novelist I would like to recall some of the people who lived in those days and the way they lived. As I have mentioned, when faced with the question of whether I am a strong or a weak man, I have to admit I am a weak man. So when I came to write my novel *Silence*, I felt like a man taking a photo of a landscape with his camera and having to decide on the position of his camera. I often walked round the places where the Kirishitan were killed and tortured. One of these places was the mountain now in the middle of eruptions, Unzen. Nearby is a place where seething hot water spurts forth, Jigokudani. There were three of us who went there at that time, the novelist Shumon Miura, Fr. Inoue and myself.

On that occasion I asked Miura, "If you were told you'd be thrown into this pit, unless you gave up your faith in Christianity, how long could you persevere?" Miura, who hadn't yet been baptized, answered, "I suppose a minute or so." Then I put the same question to Fr. Inoue. He seemed annoyed at my question. "How can I know such a thing?", he asked. "I don't know how I would react, unless it actually happened to me."

Had he vowed he would have courageously held on to his faith at the risk of his life, I'd have broken off my friendship with him. But he didn't. So I felt all the more respectful towards him. Then he said to me, "What about you, Endo?" I remember telling him, "I'd never know, because I'd faint and lose consciousness long before they brought me to the pit."

Of course, I was only joking. But I was also thinking of the people on whom I would focus in my next novel, the courageous ones or timid ones like myself. In this context, I have to say that my interest is in the so-called crypto-Christians. There was a time in our history when Toyotomi Hideyoshi invaded Korea; and my interest is in a certain general of his, Konishi

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Yukinaga, who was left with no choice but to cooperate with Toyotomi in the invasion, though he was a crypto-Christian.

The crypto-Christians were those who secretly kept their faith in small islands and far-away fishing villages in Kyushu after the prohibition of Christianity in Japan. I'm not sure if their faith could be called Christian in the strict sense of the word. Anyway, they held on the faith that had been passed down from their ancestors. But they had to lead a double life. On the one hand, they pretended to be Buddhists; and when they were summoned at the end of each year, they would step on a picture of the Virgin Mary (or *fumie*) to prove themselves non-Christians. On the other hand, on returning home, they would repent with tears for their unfaithful behavior.

This double life of theirs was interesting for us, Japanese Christians, as it bore a striking similarity with our situation during World War II.

Konishi Yukinaga, son of a Christian merchant in Sakai, was a baptized Christian. When Toyotomi seized Kyushu, he suddenly without waning prohibited Christianity. He was particularly unsparing towards the Christian generals under his command. For his headquarters he chose a temple in Hakozaki, close to modern Fukuoka, and there he issued the prohibition. Only one of his generals courageously refused to give up his faith, even at the risk of losing his land and his vassals, Takayama Ukon. All the other generals swore to Toyotomi to abandon their faith in Christianity; and Konishi was one of them.

The same day Takayama Ukon resolved to remain true to his faith, he went on board ship and fled under cover of night to Shodo Island; and there he hid himself. As for Konishi Yukinaga, he returned to the Kinki region; but one of the missionaries rebuked him for his denial of the faith and persuaded him to revoke his denial, and so he did. Still, before his master Hideyoshi he had to pretend he had abjured his Christian faith; while in secret he gave food and shelter to the missionaries, and protection to Takayama Ukon in Shodo Island.



Thus in Konishi we see an example of "double allegiance"; and he continued this attitude during the invasion of Korea. Such instances of "double allegiance" can be seen as well in famous Japanese Christians as in those crypto-Christians who handed the light of Christian faith down to us today. As a novelist, I have been interested in this "double allegiance" as a way of life; and I wrote such novels as **The Yoke of Iron** (*Tetsu no Kubikase*) and **A Life of a Woman** (*Onna no Issho*). I found their way of life had some similarity with my own way of life as a Christian during the Pacific War.

In addition to these people, both those I put in my novels and those who led (as I have just mentioned) a life of "double allegiance", there were, of course, those who may be called "strong" believers. Unfortunately, few Japanese have written about them; and this is a serious fault. While historians hunt for ancient manuscripts buried in old houses and try to dig every detail of Japanese history out of them, they hardly think of reassessing Japanese history in the light of world history.

As I write historical novels, I have had many chances of talking with these experts in history. They have told me that 90% of the historical documents have already been discovered, and that the missing 10% would probably have no new light to throw on Japanese history. From my novelist's point of view, however, I have suggested that they should reconsider their interpretation of Japanese history in the light of world history.

For example, let us take the first group of Japanese students who went abroad. They were young boys sent by St. Francis Xavier, the first missionary in history who came to preach the Gospel in Japan. Among them was a youth whose name is unknown, but who received the Christian name of Bernard. He was apparently born in Kagoshima and followed St. Francis to help him with his preaching. One day St. Francis saw this Bernard off from the wharf of a sea-port called Oita.

Now as for Oita, they seem willing to raise some statue in memory of the ancient Japanese Christians. As I happened to be writing about Otomo Sorin, I told some local officials in charge of historical matters that it was from there, or more precisely Okinohama, that St. Francis Xavier had sent the first Japanese boys to Europe; but they didn't know anything about it. So I

suggested they should set up a monument in memory of them, instead of statues unconnected with local history.

My reason for mentioning this example is that I myself went abroad to study soon after the war. When I was studying in Europe, there were no embassies of Japan, as being a defeated nation; and in Paris there were only three Japanese. You can imagine how surprised I was at everything I saw and heard. Then a question occurred to my mind, "When did the Japanese first go abroad for study?" In my poor knowledge at that time I assumed it was some time in the Meiji period. I thought the first Japanese to go abroad for study must have been Yukichi Fukuzawa, the founder of Keio University.

On my return home, I made research on this point, and I found my assumption was far from the truth. In fact, as early as the mid-sixteenth century, St. Francis Xavier sent Bernard from Japan to Europe. It took him and his companions two or three years to get there; and poor Bernard suffered from a fever on his arrival and died there.

There were other Japanese who went to Europe for study at that time, but all of them were sent by the missionaries in the early days of Japanese Christianity. After St. Francis Xavier, one of the most outstanding missionaries to come to Japan was the Jesuit Fr. Valignano. He established schools near Unzen in Kyushu, on the site of Aki castle and in other places, and he encouraged Japanese people to learn Western culture.

Thanks to the studies of Fr. Cieslik, at Sophia University, and other Kirishitan scholars, we can know something about these schools where the Japanese first learned Western culture, such as the content of the classes, and the names of the students and their teachers. Students of these schools went to Europe to learn not only Latin and Portuguese but also Western painting and music. In music they showed special talent, as it did not seem so difficult as the study of languages. The academic level of their study is available for all to see in the documentary records.

Now let me deal with the difference between these students and those who were sent abroad in the Meiji period. In the latter period, after having studied abroad and absorbed new knowledge, Japanese students were assured of a high social status and given the opportunity of playing an active role in

politics and business, as implied in the expression *yokogaeri*, or returning home after study abroad. In the early Christian days, however, as the students were Christian, on their return home they often faced a situation of ideological conflict, with the choice of whether or not to throw away what they had learned in the West.

A typical Japanese of deep faith who found himself in such a situation on his return was Kibe. After graduating from the mission school in Arima, he had the deep desire to study further. It was when the Christians had already been banished that he took his departure for Macao with the missionaries, his teachers. From there he went on with a few friends to Goa, and then he traveled by himself across the Arabian desert in a caravan. Eventually he made his way to Jerusalem, and from there he took a ship to Rome. After studying at the Collegio Romano, the present Gregorian University, in Rome, he returned to Japan. But what awaited him at home was not honor (such as students in the Meiji period received) but persecution and torture to death.

Those of you who have been to Thailand may know Ayutthaya, a town near Bangkok. At that time a military commander was living there, Nagamasa Yamada, whose aim was to build up a strong kingdom for himself. Kibe happened to visit this town on his way home; but there is no documentary proof of a meeting between the two men. Anyhow, the one aimed at building a kingdom of the outer world, and the other a kingdom of the inner world. During his stay, while looking for a ship to take him to Japan, Kibe went to the Lubang Islands in the Philippines. There he bought a ship half eaten by white ants and sailed with another Japanese priest back to Japan.

Landing at Bonotsu in Kagoshima, he eluded the look-out and engaged in missionary work in Nagasaki. Then, again avoiding the watch, he went to Mizusawa in Iwate, for the spiritual help of Christians working in the gold mines. Finally he was caught by spies and sent to Edo, where he was tried in the presence of the shogun Iemitsu. It is recorded that, as a charcoal fire was put on his stomach, the guts of Kibe gushed out; but he died a martyr and never gave up his faith.

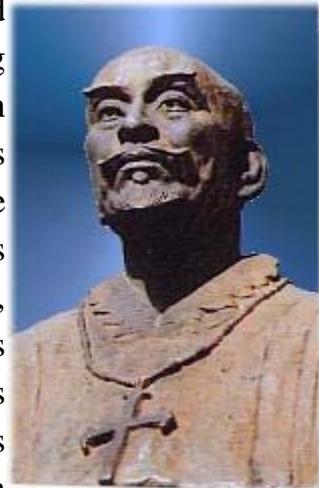
Once I visited the town called Kibe in the Kunisaki Peninsula, where Kibe's ancestors came from. There is perhaps no textbook for Japanese high-school students nor any other book of Japanese history that mentions this first

Japanese to study abroad. Yet his aspiration for study was such as to make him travel alone across the Arabian desert.

If Japanese history is considered in the light of world history, I think that a man like Kibe should be a focus of attention. Comparing such a man who is spiritually strong with another, like Konishi Yukinaga, whose spiritual weakness forced him to live a double life, we can understand how the Kirishitan kept their faith according to a certain pattern. Each of us comes across someone special in our lives. According to the Buddhist term, *enishi*, we often encounter such a one who has a decisive influence on our lives; while there are many others who have no influence on us, however often we meet them.

In the Sengoku or Kirishitan period, not all military commanders and daimyo who were baptized had a pure or pious motivation. Some of them wished to make use of Christianity, to expand their territory by trading with nambansen, or ships belonging to the missionaries. Among them I found the life of Otomo Sorin of special interest.

He was brought up in the Sengoku period, when he had no one to rely on from childhood. He was always being betrayed by someone or other, and he was not even loved by his father. In this respect, he was perhaps similar to many modern men, who also live in an age when they have no one in whom they can trust. He was particularly industrious in his study of Buddhism, which was then a form of Zen Buddhism. While he was in Bungo, corresponding to Oita Prefecture, St. Francis Xavier came from Yamaguchi. The path he trod was two meters wide with long grass on either side, which still remains on the hill near Oita airport.



Now it is written that Otomo Sorin, on seeing the miserable appearance of St. Francis, knelt down and took his hands. Since he could not believe anyone or share his feelings with others, he must have felt a shock as he saw the saint's face. What interests me is the fact that he behaved in a more generous way after that incident.

Eventually he decided to build in his own kingdom the most peaceful town in the world. He was one of the first Japanese to listen to Western music, in the form of a hymn. When told it was "musica", he was so impressed by its pure sound that he applied it to the name of his ideal town, which is still known as Mushika in Oita Prefecture.

I know of no other samurai who entertained such a thought. Such an idealist was naturally weak in battle, and when he was attacked by the Shimazu clan in Satsuma, he went to Osaka to ask Hideyoshi Toyotomi for help. Fortunately, we know the details of that time from letters he addressed to his followers. What impressed me on reading them was the contrast between Hideyoshi, who was planning to establish his kingdom on earth, and Sorin, who was planning to build a warm and peaceful land called Musica. It was because I could see this contrast clearly from his letters that, as a novelist, I was impatient to put the life of Sorin in the form of a novel.



In this connection, I should add that my father had already written a biography of Otomo Sorin. But when I read it, I confess that I found Sorin a rather inferior kind of man; nor did I understand why my father could have written such an unimportant book. While he lived, I often wanted to ask him about it but I was always too shy to do so. Later, however, on re-reading the book, I noticed the deep love of Otomo Sorin for his son, and I recognized and appreciated the other face of Sorin.

His territory included one of the largest shrines in Japan, comparable to that of Ise. Moreover, Bungo and Buzen are famous regions for the connection with Buddhism and the influence from Korea. This meant that, by giving his people permission to believe in Christianity, Sorin was running the risk of treason against himself. Yet he protected Christians in his country, because he had met such a great man as St. Francis Xavier on two or three occasions. These encounters had been very precious to him, as shown by the fact that some years later when he came to receive baptism he chose the Christian name of Francis.

As a novelist, I, too, have learned many such interesting pieces of information about missionaries and military commanders.

Another such story is of the period just before that of Meiji. A Christian missionary came from France to the church of Oura in Nagasaki, the church I regard as the most beautiful one in Japan. Then it was reserved for foreigners alone; and no Japanese were permitted to go inside. Fr. Petitjean went around on horseback, looking for descendants of the hidden Christians; and sometimes he deliberately fell from his horse to attract attention. Or he would give candies to children he met on the street. Then a visitor came to tell him he had seen a farmer praying in the chapel. He hurried to the chapel, where the farmer asked him questions about a statue of the Virgin Mary. The statue is still situated in the church. "I am of the same spirit as you," he told him. He found out that the farmer was living in the nearby village of Urakami, and he paid a visit to the village. But he came to know that the Christianity inherited from their ancestors was rather different from orthodox Christianity; so he corrected their understanding and taught them the true catechism of the Catholic Church.

After that, as one may read in the book *Tenchi Hajimari no Koto (The Beginning of the World)*, which is about the doctrine of the hidden Christians, they were baptized again. It is said they had not kept the authorized commandments but had adopted many ideas from Buddhism and Shintoism while they had neither church nor priests; and so they had strayed far from the Catholic Church.

There is a small village called Kurosaki, located about an hour's distance from Nagasaki. There one third of the population are Catholic Christians, who have been re-baptized, another third are Buddhist and the rest are still hidden Christians. The Catholic Christians celebrate Easter Day and Christmas according to the solar calendar, whereas hidden Christians celebrate them according to the lunar calendar. They are not good neighbors. Once I visited the Catholic church there and asked them to introduce me to some hidden Christians, so that I might learn their religious chant called Oransha. They told me that the hidden Christians would never talk to them just because they are Catholic; and they advised me not to tell them I was Catholic. So I visited them with a present of sake and talked with them. I even said, "Catholics are

no good", just for flattery. Such is my duality! Then I learned their Oransha and saw their old rosaries.

A French priest also visited them and spoke with them. Then an old man said to him, "You are reformed, but we are the original." In their eyes the Catholic Church looks new, reformed, whereas they are the original, because they think they have kept their religion from generation to generation. But he answered that he was a priest, just the same as those they called padre, who had preached to their ancestors. They responded that his style was different from what they had heard about padres from their ancestors, and they ran away from him. So he went to Nagasaki and came back in the habit of the Spanish or Portuguese missionaries of the seventeenth century. But the old man said, "It's still different."

The people who were re-baptized in that Village were all arrested, because Christianity was still prohibited; and they were sent everywhere in Japan. This is what is called *Urakami yoban kuzure*, meaning the attack on and destruction of Urakami. The continuation of this story is told at Tsuwano.

At that time, a Japanese political leader, Tomomi Iwakura, and his followers had gone to the United States to negotiate a treaty for the modernization of Japan. The U.S. general, Ulysses Grant, said to them, "In modern states freedom of speech, publication and religion are guaranteed; but in your country some people are arrested and put in prison just because they are Christians." On his return from the U.S., therefore, Iwakura made the proposal to add an article guaranteeing freedom of faith to the constitution, and it was accepted. This was owing to the people at Urakami, though few Japanese know this anecdote. It is ironical that the country which pushed Japan to guarantee freedom of faith was also the country that used the atomic bomb to make Japan surrender at the end of World War II.

From all I have said, we can see the strength and weakness of human beings, as well as their pain, sorrow and bravery, in the Kirishitan period. It can be said that it is a distortion or tragedy caused by the cultural encounter between East and West. This is the big difference between the period of Kirishitan and that of Meiji.

Still, I'm not sure if I'll write another novel about the Kirishitan. I'm already a kind old man, and I would like to write something more vigorous, of more interest to young people. But I would like to end my speech by saying that in Japanese history there is no more attractive or interesting period than that of Kirishitan, especially as it makes us think what it is to be a human being.

Endo, Shusaku. 1992. Kirishitan and Today. In Peter Milward, ed. The Mutual Encounter of East and West, 1492-1992. pp. 187-97. Tokyo: The Renaissance Institute (Sophia University).

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Weblished on April 17, 1999

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