

oyster. She would not relax enough to be opened again for 211 years.” (6)

1. Bergamini, David, *Japan's Imperial Conspiracy*, William Morrow and Company, Inc., New York, 1971, p. 205.
2. Latin word meaning assembly.
3. Bergamini, p. 208.
4. *Ibid*, p. 208.
5. *Ibid*, p. 213.
6. *Ibid*, pp. 214-215.

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A Brief History of Christianity in Japan prior to 1853.

The first Christians arrived in Japan in the mid- sixteenth century. “To most Japanese, foreigners were not human beings from another land but creatures in human form who might as well have come from another planet. They were called *ebisu* which meant, in the original, murderous, insular Greek sense of the word, barbarian. By the priestly rulers in Kyoto, they were regarded as unclean vermin who would pollute the sacred soil and anger the spirits interred in it.” (1)

“In 1549, the first Christian missionaries arrived in Nagasaki. They were led by the illustrious Jesuit, Francis Xavier, later to be declared a saint. The authorities followed Saint Francis’s movements closely. By fulltime application he quickly acquired a working knowledge of the Japanese language, which he described, because of its difficulty, as “a contrivance of a conciliabulum (2) of devils.” (3)

In 1568, the de facto ruler of Japan, was Oda Nobunaga. Oda was lenient towards Christians and lived to see 15,000 converts and 200 churches in the Kyoto area. He found “the pure logic and pure living of the Portuguese Jesuits fitted his conception of a holy man, and the Jesuitical view of killing as God’s business, not a sport, tallied exactly with his own feelings. He found the Christian teaching as straight and practical as a bullet. It fired the hearts of some of his

most Spartan warriors. They went into battle with Christian crosses and emblems hanging at their necks, and Oda found them more dependably fanatic at their posts than the best Shintoists.” (4)

In 1617, the then Emperor, Go-Mizu-O succeeded to power and instituted a vigorous persecution of Christians. A predecessor, Hideyoshi Ieyasu, “had set a precedent by ordering an experiment in what he understood to be the Christian form of execution. He had six Spanish friars from the Philippines and twenty of their Japanese converts nailed to crosses and exhibited while they died. Now, between 1620 and 1635, some 6,000 Christians were crucified, many of them upside down like Saint Peter.

“The menace which the Empower saw in the Christians was, from his point of view, a real one. In seventy years, by 1620, the new religion had captured the minds of one out of every fifty Japanese. The majority of the converts were peasants and many of them were foot soldiers who knew how to use guns. They had learned in the wars how to shoot down their betters at a distance, and they now had the leadership of half a dozen Christian clan lords. They set little store by the society of ghosts and spirits which surrounded other Japanese. They were ready to die for inhuman abstractions which they said were above the Emperor. (5)

In 1634, the Shogun, Tokugawa Iemitsu, “adopted a course of stringent conservatism such has never been matched in the history of any other country. In 1635 he required all clan lords to live in Tokyo one year out of every two and to leave their wives and children there as hostages when they were

absent. He made rebellion virtually impossible. The next year he ordered all merchants to trade only within Japan, he forbade Japanese dry-docks to construct oceangoing vessels; he divested all Japanese living abroad of their citizenship and promised death to any of them who ever returned to the mainland; finally he proscribed all practice of the alien Christian religion on pain of death. Thus he found a substitute for Hideyoshi’s policy of overseas expansion; thus he satisfied the imperial wish to keep Japan safe for Shintoism; thus he sealed Japan off from the rest of the world.

“When the law against Christianity was enforced and half a million converts were ordered to renounce their faith, many Japanese built their own crosses and waited to be nailed to them. Thousands were imprisoned to think things over while hundreds were being crucified as examples. Jesuit fathers who lived in hiding had to warn their parishioners against the pride of suicidal martyrdom. Tens of thousands of parishioners nevertheless died. One Christian community of 37,000, which withdrew to the headland and castle of Shimabara in Kyushu, was butchered to the last man, woman, and child. Tens of thousands of other Christians went underground, and several congregations were to resurface in Kyushu and on the north coast of Honshu 235 years later.

“In 1638, the Shogun’s police rounded up the last Portuguese priests and deported them. Thereafter one or two Catholic priests were smuggled in, hunted down, and executed, and all the ships from Catholic

countries were turned away at gunpoint. A Portuguese vessel, which called in 1640 to plead the cause of commerce, was sent home bearing as message to the outside world the corpses of sixty-one of its crewmen who had been decapitated. Toward the Protestant Dutch and English, Ieyasu’s advisor, Will Adams had given the authorities a somewhat more lenient attitude. As late as 1673 a British ship which called to trade was treated civilly. The Shogun was even inclined to let it discharge its cargo—or was until he learned that Charles II of England was married to Catherine of Braganza and that Catherine was Portuguese. After that all deals were off and the British East Indiaman was sent away with threats.

“Only a small Dutch trading post was allowed to remain in Japan, and its staff had to pay a high price for their profits. To prove their religious neutrality they had to provide their ships and canon-fire which reduced the Christian fortress of Shimabara in 1638. After 1642 they were cooped up on the tiny island of Deshima in Nagasaki harbor. To comply strictly with the Emperor’s feelings about the sanctity of Japanese soil, it was an artificial island only 300 paces long. Actually the Dutch traders had to walk to Tokyo, kiss the feet of the Shogun, perform scientific tricks and buffoonery for him, and give him a written résumé of historical events in the world outside. Periodically they also had to perform a ritual stomping of the crucifix.

“In 1642, the year Isaac Newton was born, the last Japanese priest had been crucified and Japan had closed like an