

## **The Transmission of Christian Lore**

Under the guidance of their leaders, the Christians of Urakami, Sotome, and the Gotō Islands followed the Calendar of Bastian, a 1634 Church calendar adapted for Japan's lunar calendar, turning out to celebrate holy days, observing fasting days, and performing rituals such as baptisms and funerals. A number of catechismal tracts were passed down, such as the *Short Treatise on Perfect Contrition*, dating from 1603, which taught Christians how to repent for their sins when the act of confession was not available, and *Concerning the Creation of Heaven and Earth* (published before 1829), which recounted the stories of the Bible.

In addition, in the Sotome region, four prophecies that originated with Bastian, the Japanese evangelist known for his church calendar, were passed down by word of mouth. The prophecies went as follows: (1) "Those I see as my children will, after seven generations, have their souls saved from distress." (2) "The Confessors will come in huge black ships and every week you will be able to go to confession." (3) "A time will come when you will be able to walk around and sing Christian hymns in a loud voice." (4) "If you meet nonbelievers on the road, the nonbelievers will give way to you." Curiously enough, these prophecies did indeed come true after the seventh generation, or roughly 230 years after Bastian's martyrdom in 1659.

## **"Foreign Religion Incidents" (the Urakami Crackdowns)**

The forms the faith of the Hidden Christians took varied region by region, but they all shared a determination to remain underground. At the same time, the shogunal authorities were prepared to tolerate the Hidden Christians without punishment provided they did not express their faith openly. It was in the context of this delicate balancing act—coexisting in society with the Japanese religions of Shinto and Buddhism—that the traditions of the Hidden Christians were handed down.

Many Hidden Christians lived in the Urakami region, and from the late eighteenth century, they were the focus of frequent disciplinary actions because they were betrayed by informants. These Christians, however, were never punished as Christians per se, but more generally as followers of a foreign heresy.

For example, in 1790, the village headman Takatani Eizaemon indicted 19 villagers from Yamazato in Urakami at the Nagasaki magistrate's office on suspicion of being Christians. However, to prevent the situation from escalating, they were not officially recognized as

Christians. (This episode is known as the First Urakami Crackdown.) Although the details are not entirely clear, it seems that the Second Urakami Crackdown of 1839 followed a similar pattern of rounding up suspects and then releasing them.

However, in the Third Urakami Crackdown of 1856, reports from informants resulted in the arrest of a series of the leaders of the Urakami Hidden Christians, including Kataoka Shunmin and his son, both physicians, at Shironokoshi, and the *chōkata* Kichizō. Subjected to harsh interrogation, a number of them died in prison. Ultimately, though, the whole incident was treated as an incident of foreign heresy.

During the Third Urakami Crackdown, the 113th Nagasaki Magistrate Okabe Suruga no kami Nagatsune, who interrogated the *chōkata* Kichizō, produced a detailed record of how the Hidden Christians of the time practiced their faith. Numerous statuettes hidden in people's houses in Urakami, such as the white porcelain image of Maria Kannon and the metal figurine of Inashio (Ignatius of Loyola, Founder of the Society of Jesus), were confiscated.

#### **PICTURE 1**

*Our Lady of the Snows* (from Sotome)

Early 17th century

(Twenty-Six Martyrs Museum)

#### **PICTURE 2**

Statuette of Maria Kannon

Ca. 17th century

(Sōtō Sect [Zen] Tenpukuji Temple)

The Urakami Christians are believed to have taken this statue to Tenpukuji Temple in Kashiyama in the Fukabori domain for safekeeping during the Third Urakami Crackdown in 1856. Tenpukuji had a policy of tacit tolerance toward Christianity.