

### III. The Expansion and Maintenance of the Hidden Christian Brotherhoods

Large-scale migration to the Gotō Islands took place in the late eighteenth century in response to the growth of the population of Sotome, a region on the west coast of the Nishisonogi Peninsula under the control of the Omura clan. The settlers included many Hidden Christians.

The Hidden Christians knew they needed to live along with existing Japanese society and religions if they were to preserve their way of life, and this was the basis for choosing migration destinations. Some examples of the places they chose to settle were **Kuroshima (7)**, where the abandoned horse farms of the Hirado domain needed to be redeveloped; **Nozaki Island (8)** which was a sacred place in the Shinto religion; **Kashiragashima Island (9)**, which was used for quarantining people with smallpox; and **Hisaka Island (10)**, which had been left undeveloped in line with Gotō domain policy.

### IV. Second Missionary Contact; Hiding Ends

In response to the demands of the United States and other Western powers, the Tokugawa shogunate opened up the ports of Shimoda and Hakodate to trade in 1854. Following the later opening of the port of Nagasaki, missionaries arrived there and built **Oura Cathedral (12)** for the residents of the foreign settlement. Very soon after the cathedral was completed, a Hidden Christian woman from Urakami disclosed her faith to one of the priests. This dramatic episode, known as the “Discovery of the Hidden Christians,” was to change the fortunes of the Hidden Christians of the Nagasaki Region.

With the Hidden Christians inspired to reveal their faith, the government became increasingly repressive, and made a series of moves against the Hidden Christian communities. This, in turn, provoked vigorous protests from the Western powers, which led to the lifting of the prohibition of Christianity by the Meiji government in 1873.

Some of the Hidden Christians decided to accept the guidance of the new generation of missionaries and abandoned the practices developed over the years of prohibition. There were some, however, known as *Kakure Kirishitan*, who rejected the missionaries’ authority and stayed with their own forms of faith. There was also a third group of Hidden Christians who chose to convert to Shinto and Buddhism.

The former Hidden Christians started building simple churches in their own villages. One example is **Egami Church on Naru Island (11)**. These churches symbolized two things: first, the revival of Catholic worship, and second, the fact that the era of hiding, which characterized the Nagasaki region during the two-and-a-half century ban on Christianity, was finally over.

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## The History of Christianity in the Nagasaki Region

### I. Beginnings

1549 Francis Xavier brings Christianity to Japan

1614 Nationwide ban on Christianity promulgated

1637 The Shimabara Rebellion breaks out

### II. Formation of Hidden Traditions

1641 The Tokugawa shogunate establishes a ban on maritime activities

1644 Last missionary in Japan martyred

1700 Christians decide to maintain their faith by lying low. They develop rituals specifically designed to evade detection.

They worship mountains and islands, religious paintings, and shrines, as well as shells and other everyday items.

### **III. Maintaining and Expanding the Tradition**

1797 Migration from Sotome to the Gotō Islands and other islands

The Hidden Christians of Sotome select places to settle where they can coexist with traditional society and religion and continue with their faith in secret.

Kuroshima villages, Nozaki Island villages, Kashiragashima Island villages, Hisaka Island villages

1859 Nagasaki port opens to foreign vessels (excluding China and the Netherlands)

### **IV. Transition and End**

1865 Hidden Christians reveal their faith in the “Discovery of the Hidden Christians”

1873 Christianity is made legal

1918 Egami Church is completed

The end of the Hidden Christian tradition