

Oratio: The History of Christianity in Japan

The Christian religion passed through three phases in Japan: a first phase of arrival and flourishing; a second of being outlawed and forced underground; and a third of revival after the lifting of the ban. But what was life like for Japan's Christians throughout this four-century-long history? This is the story of them and their faith.

Oratio Story (1)

The Arrival and Flourishing of Christianity

Christianity Brings Japan and Europe Together

Portugal began to project its power around the world in the mid-fifteenth century. By the end of that century, it had begun moving into Asia in search of bases for trade; it reached Southeast Asia around the middle of the sixteenth century.

The Society of Jesus (founded with the approval of Pope Paul III in 1540) dispatched missionaries to India in response to a request from the King of Portugal. Their mission was to launch propagation efforts from their Goa base. Francis Xavier, one of the Jesuit missionaries, had a chance encounter with a Japanese man in Malacca, another Portuguese trading hub. Their conversations inspired Xavier to take his religious message to Japan, and he arrived at Kagoshima in 1549. This was the start of the relationship between Japan and Europe, centered around Christianity.