

The Opening of Japan and the Discovery of the Hidden Christians

The Lifting of the Ban and the Revival of Christianity

### **Japan Reopens; Catholic Missions Start and New Churches Are Constructed**

After the chaos and secularization of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, the Catholic church in France was undergoing a period of revival. In 1838, the Vatican entrusted the Paris Foreign Missions Society, which was already active in Vietnam and China, with the responsibility for the repropagation of Japan. As early as 1844, missionaries went to live in the nearby Ryukyu Islands (now Okinawa) to explore the possibility of gaining entry into Japan.

In the nineteenth century, the Western powers, galvanized by the industrial revolution, began to expand overseas. In 1854, under pressure from the United States of America, Japan abandoned its policy of national seclusion. In 1858, it signed trade treaties with the principal Western powers, and the ports of Hakodate, Kanagawa, and Nagasaki were opened in 1859.

Father Prudence Girard of the Paris Foreign Missions Society came to Japan in 1859, initially as the interpreter for the French consul general. In 1863, Father Louis Furet made the move from Yokohama to Nagasaki, followed by Father Bernard Petitjean six months later.

Meanwhile, the opening of the country had also inspired Pope Pius IX to canonize the 26 martyrs crucified in Nagasaki in 1597. Missionary work was resumed in Nagasaki and plans to build a new church there got underway.