

The Removal of the Ban on Christianity and the Revival of Catholicism

The Discovery of the Hidden Christians had a major historical impact. Since the ban on Christianity was still in force in Japan, it provoked the government to ratchet up its repressive stance toward the Christians, even after the Meiji Restoration in 1868. The Urakami Christians who had first confessed their faith were the subjects of a crackdown, as were Christian communities in the Gotō Islands. Ultimately, around 3,400 Christians from Urakami were exiled to 20 different domains in western Japan, where they were coerced into converting to Shinto.

Eventually, however, vigorous protests by the Western powers prompted the Meiji government to abolish the edict against Christianity. The faithful were able to come out of hiding, be baptized once again by the missionaries and return to the Catholic faith. The missionaries were able to impart proper instruction to the community leaders of the Hidden Christians and convert their houses into places of prayer in the absence of proper churches. With the collaboration of the local people, a series of churches in simple but diverse styles were built in various communities.