

THE KAKURE KIRISHITAN
of
JAPAN



A STUDY OF THEIR DEVELOPMENT, BELIEFS AND
RITUALS TO THE PRESENT DAY

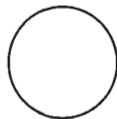
STEPHEN TURNBULL

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Stephen Turnbull



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15 The Quadrant, Richmond, Surrey TW9 1BP*

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A CIP catalogue entry for this book is
available from the British Library

ISBN 1-873410-70-0

The publishers gratefully acknowledge the financial
support provided by the Japan Foundation
[Publications Assistance Programme] in the making
of this book.

Typeset in Stone 9½ on 12pt by LaserScript, Mitcham, Surrey
Printed and bound in England by Bookcraft, Avon

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Preface & Acknowledgements

In certain remote areas of southern Japan live a number of communities who maintain a religious faith that appears to an outsider as a strange blend of Christianity, Shintō and Buddhism. They refer to themselves as 'Kakure' (the hidden ones), or 'Kakure Kirishitan' (hidden Christians), a name which identifies them with the Japanese Christians who kept the faith as an underground church during two-and-a-half centuries of persecution. When European missionaries returned during the 1860s and 1870s the majority of these secret Christians chose to be reconciled with the Catholic Church. Others did not, choosing instead a path of separation and secrecy similar to that which their ancestors had trod, thus preserving and developing the distinctive set of beliefs, rituals and traditions that became the Kakure faith of today.

Many individuals and organizations have been more than helpful in the preparation of this study. Essential funding for the fieldwork visits was provided by the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, who awarded me a travelling scholarship, together with grants from the Great Britain-Sasakawa Foundation, and the Japan Foundation Endowment Committee. These vital contributions are gratefully acknowledged.

This book began as the thesis for a Ph.D., so my first thanks must go to my supervisors at Leeds University, Dr Philip Mellor of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, and Dr Mark Williams, of the Department of East Asian Studies. Through their experience in religious and Japanese studies I have quite literally had the best of both worlds. Father Michael Cooper S.J., of Sophia University, Tokyo, provided me with much useful information at the beginning of the study, and Dr John Breen of SOAS greatly assisted in the initial identification of bibliographic sources. It is no

exaggeration to say that the advice (and photocopies!) received from these generous individuals saved at least six months' work.

My first fieldwork trip was facilitated by several people, many of whom helped me during the initial survey of the Kakure areas and other places associated with the history of Christianity in Japan. Martin Repp, of the NCC Centre for the Study of Japanese Religions, allowed me the use of the Centre's library and facilities. Father Frank McKay guided me round Hondo on the Amakusa islands. Ogino Kazukata took me to the fascinating museum at the Eikō-ji in Nagoya. Hirata Matsuo provided much information about Christianity in Imamura, and allowed me access to his private museum of Christian artefacts. Matsuda Shigeo of Tottori shared with me his research into the Christians of the time of secrecy, and Father Robert Flynn sent me material about the Christian exiles of Tsuwano. Miyamoto Tsugito supplied much information about graves on the Shimabara peninsula, and Professor Terashima Zingara of Hokkaido Women's College briefed me about Christianity in Hokkaido.

As my study of the Kakure developed, it was the contacts in the area of Nagasaki prefecture which proved to be most valuable. Father Diego Yuuki responded patiently and informatively to my numerous questions on Christian history in what was the first of several visits to him over the next three years. On the Gotō island group Christal Whelan shared with me the excellent work she had been doing there, which led me to base my study on another community of Kakure, rather than risk duplication. My biggest thanks, in terms of allowing me access to the Kakure themselves, must go to Yamaura Yoshiharu of Ikitsuki Town Office. He not only introduced me to certain key officials of the Kakure Kirishitan on the island but also acted as guide and chauffeur. It is because of him that I was able to consider a study of this depth using the Ikitsuki community. Through him I was also introduced to the local scholars and historians who have been involved in the design and contents of the Ikitsuki Local History Museum, contacts which have since proved invaluable.

The most valuable contacts made on Ikitsuki were, of course, the leaders of the Kakure Kirishitan communities themselves. Without their hospitality and kindness none of the subsequent fieldwork studies could have been carried out. As it was, I was invited into their homes, was shown their precious holy objects, and made welcome at their festivals. I would particularly like to thank Ōoka Tomeichi, *oyajiyaku* of the Takenoshita *tsumoto* in Ichibu, Fujimura Hideo, *ojiyaku* of Sakaime, Toriyama Yasutaka, *goban'nushi* of

Sakaime, and Maeda Hideo, *ojisama* of Yamada, for their help and friendship, involving several visits to their homes, observation sessions at religious gatherings, and above all for their patient response to my questions. Through their generosity I have been able to include in this study detailed, original and wide-ranging material from three out of the four active Kakure communities still existing on Ikitsuki.

My visits to other Kakure areas were largely opportunistic, and were facilitated from outside the communities themselves. I would particularly like to thank Nakamura Nobuaki, Chairman of the Shrine Committee of the Kōtai-jingu, in Higashi-Kashiyama, for inviting me as his guest to the 1993 shrine visit, with its important Christian associations. Visits to Sotome, Takero, Neshiko, Fukue and Naru were all helped by the staff of the local Tourist Offices, to whom I am most grateful.

I would also like to acknowledge the help and advice of other scholars whose studies have at some time or another included the Kakure Kirishitan. Christal Whelan and John Breen have already been mentioned. I have also gained immeasurably from corresponding with, and reading the published works of Dr Ann Harrington of Loyola University, Chicago, Dr Angela Volpe of Nagoya Sacred Heart University, and Peter Nosco of the University of California. Dr Ian Reader and Dr Joseph Moran of Stirling University, and Professor Brian Bocking of Bath College of Higher Education, have also been very helpful in the more general areas of Japanese religion and Japanese Christian history.

There is one scholar, however, that I must single out for particular mention. I first made contact with Professor Miyazaki Kentarō following a computer search carried out on my behalf by the British Library. In 1992 we met up at Junshin University, Nagasaki, where Kentarō first shared with me the fruits of his innovative and painstaking fieldwork with the Kakure of Ikitsuki, carried out since 1986. Much of this was at that time still unpublished, and even though he was then engaged upon the production of his own book on the Kakure (Miyazaki 1996b), this did not prevent him from sharing his findings, and his thoughts, with a potential rival. This has therefore enabled me to enrich my own work considerably, and although the present manuscript was completed prior to the publication of Miyazaki's book, my use of his notes and preliminary sketches has resulted in this work being as up to date as possible in terms of new directions in Kakure research. Would that all academic exchanges could be carried out in such a friendly and cooperative

fashion! One result of the openness on both sides was that I was then able to choose case studies to observe that were different from the ones he had covered. In this way I may have been able to make some small contribution to his own excellent corpus of work, and in April 1995 I was delighted when he and I were able to combine forces to observe the *Hattai-sama* festival at Yamada. I also thank Kentarō and his wife Miki for their hospitality to my wife and me, which we were fortunately able to reciprocate.

My final acknowledgements must go to the Kakure Kirishitan themselves, who happily tolerated my presence at many of their private gatherings. Whether officials or ordinary believers, this study is theirs, and I trust it will be regarded as an accurate and sympathetic account of their unique and precious traditions.

I thank Michael O'Connor for allowing me the use of his word-processor printing facility, and Ian Bottomley for his invaluable help in compiling the glossary of Japanese terms.

I conclude with the warmest thanks to my dear wife Jo, whose support never wavered, and who finally had the chance to accompany me to the island of Ikitsuki to meet the people whose lives and whose community's history form the subject matter of the pages which follow.

STEPHEN TURNBULL

Introduction

The Kakure Kirishitan: their nomenclature and location

The Kakure Kirishitan, (literally the 'Hidden Christians'), are the descendants of the communities who maintained the Christian faith in Japan as an underground church during the time of persecution, which lasted from about 1614 until 1873, and who then chose not to be reconciled with the newly returned Catholic missionaries. The name is sometimes shortened to 'Kakure' (the hidden ones), and for the past century several of these communities have continued a separate and distinctive religious faith, its characteristics reflecting the conditions their ancestors experienced during the period of prohibition. When the decision to stay separate was made the original Kakure also chose to remain secret, but their hidden nature nowadays ranges from complete openness to a secret religion never revealed to outsiders. The Kakure, therefore, share a common inheritance with those Japanese Catholics who can trace their ancestry beyond the return of the European missionaries in the 1860s, through the time of secrecy, and back to the originally evangelized communities of the 'Christian Century', the expression commonly given to the period between 1549, when missionaries first arrived in Japan, and 1639, when relations with Catholic Europe were effectively severed. In other words the *Kirishitan* (the original name given to the converts) went underground, becoming thereby *Senpuku Kirishitan* (secret Kirishitan) and in the years following their re-emergence a split occurred, communities either joining the Catholic Church, or becoming the separated Kakure Kirishitan.

In this work I reserve the expression 'Kakure Kirishitan' for the modern, separated communities who form the subject of the study,

and not their secret Christian predecessors. In his pioneering study of the Kakure, published in 1954, Tagita Kōya referred to them as *Senpuku Kirishitan*, but he remains the only writer to have applied this term to the modern communities. Five years later Furuno Kiyoto was to create the term *kirishitanisumu* (Kirishitanism) for what he regarded as the communities' unique syncretism of Christianity and Japanese religion, and used the word to contrast their faith with the Catholicism they had rejected (1959:110f). His book is, however, entitled *Kakure Kirishitan*, the same title (though written in the phonetic *hiragana* syllabary) given to both book and community that was to be employed a decade later by Kataoka Yakichi (1967). The development of the term has been discussed by Miyazaki (1992b), who argues that at the time of the decision to remain separate, both sides felt the need to make a clear distinction between them. 'Kakure Kirishitan' thus became an appropriate term, because its notion of 'hiding' referred back to the *kakure-mino*, the 'cloak of invisibility' of Buddhism and Shinto, which the secret Christians had pulled over themselves for two centuries. It also indicated the need to remain in hiding lest persecution should break out again (1992b:3). There was perhaps also the implication that they were 'hiding' from the newly returned missionaries. Yuuki identifies a certain 'lack of tact in the catechists trying to shepherd them back into the church' (1994:124).

Miyazaki finds inappropriate Tagita's use of *senpuku* for the modern communities, as it does not distinguish the situation existing before the granting of religious freedom in 1873 from the situation subsequent to it. He also suggests that the word *kakure* should be written not in *kanji* (Chinese characters) or the phonetic *hiragana*, but in *katakana*, the phonetic syllabary used for words of foreign extraction, thereby indicating that they are a separate group, and playing down any possible literal interpretation of the meaning as people actually 'in hiding' (1992b:4).

We must not, however, overlook the second term 'Kirishitan'. The modern expression for Christianity is *Kirisuto-kyō*, 'Kirishitan' being used solely for the period prior to 1873. The significance of using 'Kirishitan' for the present-day Kakure communities is surely that of looking back to, and identifying with an earlier period of history. Thus one expression used by certain of the communities to describe themselves is *Kyū Kirishitan* (Old Kirishitan), 'old' in this context indicating 'the original and genuine', suggesting an explicit link to the faith received during the 'Christian Century'. However, many Kakure Kirishitan nowadays prefer to dispense with the

second term 'Kirishitan', and refer to themselves simply as 'Kakure', which might indicate a different self-perception, whereby they are not referring to a religious faith at all, but making a statement about their socio-historical identity (Whelan 1994:91).

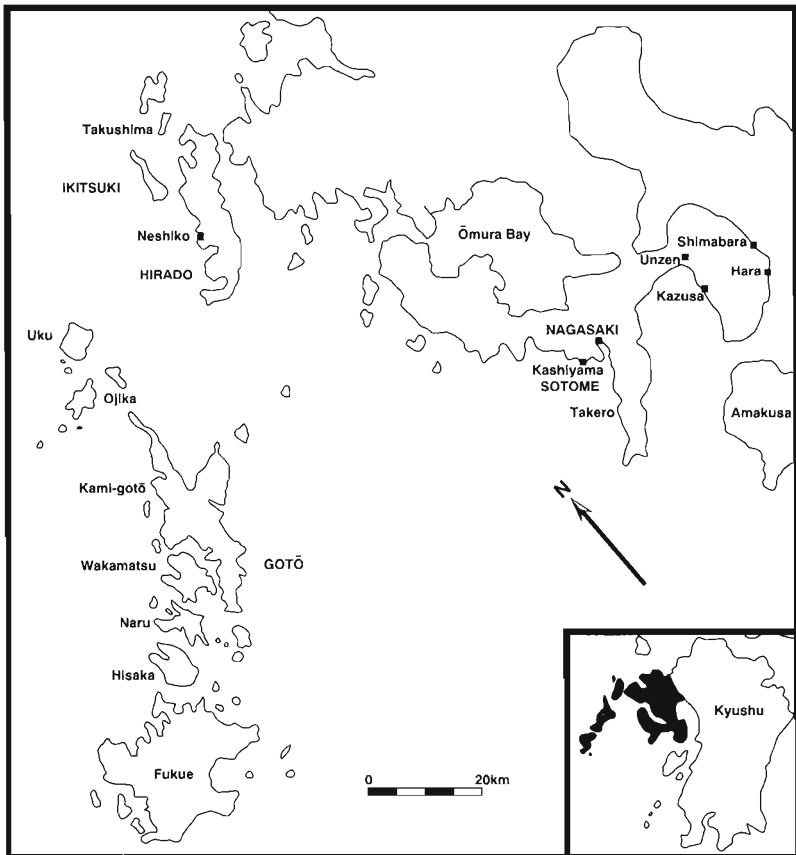
There are several ways in which the term Kakure Kirishitan has been translated into languages other than Japanese. To use the popular and literal English translation 'Hidden Christians' immediately poses the question as to what these people are now hiding from, so it is perhaps preferable that the words should be left in romanized Japanese, thus implying the study of a particular religious group rather than a behaviour pattern. This is the form that will be adopted here. Notwithstanding its usefulness in popular expression, the English term 'Hidden Christians' has also had to compete with the use of such expressions as 'Crypto-Christians' or 'Crypto-Catholics', (e.g. Laures 1954; Schütte 1968; Yuuki 1994).¹ As to the terminology applied to the underground church of the time of persecution, *Senpuku Kirishitan* is favoured by Miyazaki, and in English 'secret Christians', 'underground Christians' or 'the underground church' are all acceptable as a means of identification. But where the historical context is clearly that of the time prior to the 1860s, when the distinction caused by the split had not yet arisen, a simple reference to them as 'Christians' or 'Catholics' will suffice in the pages which follow.

The Kakure Kirishitan communities are located in Nagasaki Prefecture, which lies at the north-west of the main southern island of Kyūshū.² Its topography is a complex one of islands, peninsulas and enclosed bays, linked in modern times by a number of strategic bridges and coastal roads which have greatly improved communications compared with a century ago. However, during the period of persecution, communications between districts and communities were limited less by geography than by politics, the most formidable barriers being those set up on the borders of the *han*, the territories of the *daimyō*, who were the Japanese equivalent of feudal lords. The *daimyō* ruled the *han* as the local half of the Tokugawa administrative system known as the *baku-han*, whereby government was divided between the locally focussed *han* and the central *bakufu* (the Tokugawa Shogunate).

The modern administrative area of Nagasaki Prefecture is roughly coterminous with the former province of Hizen, of which the territory was divided between the fiefs of the Matsuura family (the Hirado-*han*), the Ōmura (the Ōmura-*han*), the Nabeshima (the Saga-*han*, plus some other territories), the Matsudaira (the Shimabara-

han), the Gotō (the Gotō-*han* on the island chain of the same name), the Karatsu-*han* of the Ogasawara, which is now within Saga Prefecture, and the city of Nagasaki, which was under direct government control. The fiefs were by no means tidily divided one from another, and in some cases formed a patchwork of ownership, a particular example being the important Christian site of Kashiya on the Sonogi peninsula to the north-west of Nagasaki City. Kashiya is itself a peninsula that projects due south, and achieved great symbolic value to the underground church as it was regarded as pointing towards Rome (Urakawa 1926:306). During the Tokugawa Period it included two villages, Nishi-Kashiya and Higashi-Kashiya (west- and east- respectively) located 500 m

Figure 1 Nagasaki prefecture and the location of the Kakure Kirishitan



apart on opposite sides of the valley. Nishi-Kashiyama was however in the Ōmura-*han*, while Higashi-Kashiyama was in the Saga-*han*, and was administered from Fukabori, across Nagasaki Bay (Tagita 1954:2,60). According to Furuno, its location under the *daimyō* of Saga meant that the Christians of Higashi-Kashiyama suffered less interference than did Nishi-Kashiyama (1959:176).

The Kakure Kirishitan communities may be divided into two broad groupings depending on the central focus of their religious lives (Tagita 1954:7). In the north-west of Nagasaki prefecture are to be found the communities who emphasise the preservation and use of certain holy objects, traditionally known as *nandogami* (the gods of the storeroom), an expression sometimes used for the believers themselves. During the time of persecution this territory was the Hirado-*han*, under the prominent family of Matsuura. There is a Kakure Kirishitan community at Neshiko, on the west coast of Hirado island, which is an important site of Christian martyrdom, but its inhabitants still maintain their privacy and are unwilling to discuss their faith with outsiders.

By contrast, the island of Ikitsuki, which since July 1991 has been joined to Hirado by a suspension bridge, contains several Kakure communities which display varying degrees of both openness and vigour, and have thus provided data for the main part of this study. The island measures about 10 km north to south, and is about 3 km wide at its southern end, with a narrow neck of land containing the small fishing port of Misaki at its northern tip. The centres of population, which, in the 1965 census consisted of 9650 individuals spread among 2453 households (Miyazaki 1988b:13), are located completely on its eastern, Hirado side, as were the only roads until the building of the circular coastal road that was opened in March 1993. In addition to the port of Misaki, the fishing industry, which is vital to Ikitsuki, is concentrated on the two major modernized ports of Ichibu and Tachiura. Deep sea trawlers now leave from Ikitsuki along with the inshore boats for squid and other varieties. A century ago a whaling fleet was based at Ichibu, but this has long since disappeared. From the sea coast the ground rises steeply through carefully cultivated terraced fields which grow rice and also provide pasture for cattle. The agricultural areas, where nearly all the Kakure are to be found, are from north to south Ichibu-zai, Sakaime, Motofure and Yamada. The farmland finishes in a long backbone of wooded hills of which the peak is the mountain called Bandake (286m), from which almost the entire coast of the island is visible. To the west there is a steep descent through forest to the open sea,

while in the east lies the shoreline of Hirado, and before it the prominent landmark of the small rocky 'martyrs' island' of Nakae no shima, where several Christians were executed in 1622 and 1624.

The other broad division of Kakure is characterized by the communities' commitment to the church calendar (Tagita 1954:7).³ Almost all these groups fall within what was formerly the *Ōmura-han*, of which the most important are those associated with the Sotome area, on the western side of the Sonogi peninsula which divides Ōmura Bay from the sea to the north-west of Nagasaki city. Most of the Sotome area is now in the administrative district known as Sotome-*chō* (township), although the above-mentioned Kashiya falls within the borders of Nagasaki City. Sotome-*chō* contains villages such as Kurosaki, Shitsu and Nagata, all of which are associated with an underground Christian tradition, and have Kakure communities in various states of secrecy, vigour or decline.

The Kakure communities of the Gotō island chain are commonly believed to have originated from the Sonogi peninsula, rather than from surviving Gotō Christians, although this theory has recently been challenged.⁴ Many families did move there from the Sonogi peninsula at the end of the eighteenth century, taking their secret Christian faith with them. They fled poverty more than persecution, their emigration being part of an arrangement between the Ōmura *daimyō*, whose lands had an excess of population, and the Gotō *daimyō* who had a shortage of labour, in a process described by Whelan (1992:382). The Gotō Kakure are to be found nowadays on Fukue, the southernmost island of the Gotō group, and Naru. The Kakure population of Takero, a village on the Nomo peninsula south of Nagasaki also came about as a result of emigration from the Sotome area (Kataoka 1986:177). Finally, there are within this group the Kakure of Nagasaki City. The Christians from Urakami in Nagasaki were the first to be revealed to the returning missionaries, and most rejoined the church, leaving very few to stay as Kakure Kirishitan. This, together with the depredations caused by the Atomic Bomb, has left little in the way of a Kakure tradition today. A small community was still in existence in Ieno-machi in 1993, though Miyazaki, who has studied them, reports their rituals as being confined to family ancestor worship using Christian prayers, with any other recognisable Kakure Kirishitan element being virtually extinct (1986:177).

The one factor that all the Kakure Kirishitan would appear to have in common is a decline both in numbers and in activity. According to Yuuki, it is many years since any baptisms were

performed in Takero, Sotome or the Gotō.⁵ Instead, they have become communities whose average ages are growing as their numbers fall. Out of all the Kakure groups it is those on Ikitsuki that are least in decline, but even there a fall in numbers may be noted.⁶

Aims of the study

It is the overall aim of the present work to identify the influences which have led to the creation, preservation, development and expression of the Kakure Kirishitan faith. As all the Kakure communities are in decline, a secondary aim is that of recording even a small amount of a unique corpus of belief and ritual before it is lost forever, and linking it to the remarkable achievement of their *senpuku* predecessors. Within these broad aims are contained five basic questions:

- (1) What relationship exists between the input of Christian doctrine and ritual in the sixteenth century, the religious life of the underground church, and the Kakure Kirishitan faith of today?
- (2) What relationship exists between Japanese religion and the Kakure Kirishitan faith?
- (3) What other social, political, religious or historical influences have been involved in the development and current expression of the Kakure Kirishitan faith?
- (4) Are there differences between various Kakure communities, and, if so, do they provide an explanation of why some have continued while others have died out?
- (5) Should the Kakure Kirishitan faith be regarded as the preservation of Christianity, the transformation of Christianity, or the denial of Christianity? Can any positive contribution to Christianity be identified?

To assist the investigation, I suggest three broad theoretical models of the process that may have taken place in the creation of the Kakure faith. It must however be noted at this stage that, as suggested by question (4) above, different models may apply to different communities, and there may also have been some variation within the same communities over a period of time.

The first model is that of the Kakure faith as the preservation of an old form of Catholicism that has been modified by its surroundings. According to this model Kakure prayers and rituals, for example, may be seen as a form of time capsule linking us to the originally evangelised Kirishitan, with whom there is a close

identification, and to whom the forms of worship may be traced. In a note on the Kakure in his study of Japanese folk religion, Hori wrote that 'they still believe they transmit the authentic Catholicism of Xavier', even though, in Hori's opinion, 'the contents of their faith have been radically transformed and reshaped by folk religion and indigenous elements' (1968:15). The possibility will be considered that the supposed 'unusual form of Catholicism' exhibited by the Kakure may have come about as a reaction to the deprivation of the Church's sacraments, caused directly by the Japanese Christians' isolation. In the absence of priests there could not have been any Eucharist or confession, anointing of the sick, confirmation or holy orders, resulting in a religious system that can best be understood as a response to this loss. The sacraments may then have been compensated for during the time of secrecy by identifiable alternative practices, and perhaps by a greater emphasis on the more popular and less sacramental aspects of Catholic devotion. All these characteristics should therefore appear among Kakure practices, with the resultant faith regarded as the preservation of Christianity.

By contrast, the second model identifies a radical transformation of Catholicism, rather than any preservation of it, which came about as the result of an active and willing decision either to camouflage Christian belief and ritual in a cloak of Buddhism, Shintō and folk religion, or simply to express it through these forms. This camouflage or expression, unavoidably, then became a form of syncretism, a term defined below. By deliberately choosing certain elements of Japanese religion, and deliberately discarding other elements of Catholicism, the Kakure have therefore produced an identifiably Christian yet syncretic faith, which may be regarded as a unique contribution to Christianity. From this point of view the Kakure Kirishitan represent the acculturation of Christianity within the Japanese religious milieu. No surprise is expressed at this metamorphosis, for it is the same process that made Japanese Buddhism Japanese, and the result is regarded as evidence that Christianity can be subject to a similar change. Christianity is therefore preserved, but transformed.

The third model takes a somewhat similar view of the process of transformation, but rejects the idea that a uniquely Japanese Christian faith was produced. In this view, the Kakure have totally abandoned Christianity. They are therefore the adherents of a new religion, akin to the other 'New Religions' found in Japanese society, some of which involve borrowed Christian elements. The Kakure

faith was therefore brought about by a blending of indigenous traditions with a strong and historical Christian input, but it is now impossible to regard it as still being Christian. Christianity, therefore, was denied. That the underground Christians did not rejoin the Catholic Church during the 1860's is then easily explained: when confronted with the reality of Christianity they came to realise that they had moved so far away from it that return had become impossible. The resulting cult of Kakure Kirishitan continued beyond this period for social and political reasons, such as fidelity to the traditions of the ancestors, and perhaps even from pressure on members of a community to conform to an established Kakure hierarchy unwilling to yield the local power it had enjoyed. The Kakure faith would therefore fit into the pattern of Japanese religion as 'a plurality of religious traditions . . . in the overall unity of a common culture and religious context' (Earhart 1974:2).

Some theoretical and methodological considerations

Certain theoretical terms have been used in the above models which now require firm definition. Most of these are concerned with descriptions of the possible outcomes which may arise when different religious and/or cultural systems meet. In the theoretical vocabulary an objective term for such interaction is 'acculturation', defined as 'those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups' (Redfield et. al. 1936:149). But whereas this may provide an objective and neutral definition to outsiders, even the most detached observer of such a process must acknowledge that to the participants in the interaction it is not a neutral experience, but one laden with value, and judged either positively or negatively from the point of view of one of the existing cultures. The state resulting from the interaction may be temporary or permanent, convergent or divergent, all of which depend upon several factors, not the least of which are the cultures' relative strengths. Thus one extreme example of the acculturating process is colonialism, where a stronger culture 'civilises' the weaker indigenous one, often with the virtual extinction of the latter.

An important distinction must be made, however, between material and spiritual culture. Material culture can often be adopted with relatively minor modifications. This is not the case with spiritual culture, which includes symbols, meanings, values and

relationships, and of which religion is its most important manifestation.⁷ Christianity was introduced to Japan in the sixteenth century by Jesuit missionaries. The spread of religions through mission is a particular case of the acculturation process at work, and it is a commonplace view to recognize that when people forsake their former religion for another that some of the old beliefs become mixed in with the new. Students of mission then often ask where a resulting cultural mix may be placed along a notional continuum ranging from the 'pure' Christianity that was introduced, to the total absorption of Christianity by the native culture. This latter extreme would of course be the exact opposite of the 'civilisation' model noted above, but the key to distinguishing which culture will dominate the other lies only partly in identifying the location of power. It will also depend on the missionary technique adopted, of which two broad approaches may be discerned. The first emphasises the discontinuity in adopting a new religion. It is the *tabula rasa*: the 'clean break with the past'. The other attitude emphasizes the continuity between the old and the new. Here the evangelized peoples are not regarded as being totally in error, so the missionary takes what he finds in pagan customs and brings it into the Christian plan. The former model was adopted in Mexico, where, according to Ricard, the missionaries 'had a low opinion of Indians', and concentrated on the sacraments of baptism and marriage, rather than on the others. The Eucharist was seen as 'the reward for piety, not as the way to it' (1966:288).

The Jesuit attitude in Japan was somewhat different, for when dealing with the upper social classes the missionaries made a conscious attempt to adapt themselves to Japanese customs, though not to Japanese religion. There was some use made of Japanese religious concepts, such as the use of the term *Dainichi* for God, but this was a mere administrative convenience, abandoned once it was realized that it caused confusion (Kishino 1986:185). However, although their Catholicism was rigidly exclusivist, the Jesuits were masters of the principle of 'substitute rather than destroy', by replacing, for example, the *Bon* festival, so important in Japanese ancestor worship, with the Feast of All Souls. Residual beliefs, therefore, could easily have remained to produce an acculturation of Christianity in Japan, in spite of the missionaries' intentions. Whelan goes much further in this regard, implying that the first Japanese Christians were not really converted at all, and that the usual understanding of the evolution of the Kakure faith is based on a misconception:

. . . rather than viewing the Kakure Kirishitan religion as an unwilling grafting of Shintō and Buddhism on to some imagined secure Christian stock, assuming the opposite to be true is perhaps more useful in understanding the situation of the Kakure Kirishitan as it appears today (1994:90)

The second important term used is 'syncretism', a word frequently regarded as having a negative connotation. In an influential paper written for a world missionary meeting in 1938 Hendrik Kraemer, who believed that conversion to Christianity implied 'a break with one's religious past', defined syncretism as the 'illegitimate mingling of different religious elements' (Thomas 1985:388). Unfortunately, as noted by several commentators, the danger of syncretism was the only message heard by Kraemer's audience, who ignored the very powerful contrast he made between the illegitimate 'syncretism' and the legitimate, and necessary, processes of 'incarnations and adaptations of Christianity', which make up the positive process of acculturation. He pointed out that such adaptations had taken place throughout church history, and that Western Christianity, from which the missions had arisen, was itself an adaptation (1985:389). This contrast was, however, ignored, so that any effort at indigenization of Christianity was indiscriminately dubbed syncretistic and therefore condemned (1985:389).

More recently, Kamstra has proposed an objective definition of syncretism as 'the coexistence of elements foreign to each other within a specific religion, whether or not these elements originate in other religions or, for example, in social structures' (Pye 1971:83). Pye has also noted the dynamic aspect of religious traditions, and adds the idea that since traditions are changing all the time, any particular case of syncretism is necessarily temporary, even though it is coherent for the believers at the time. He also stresses the ambiguity inherent in syncretism, in that divergent meanings are latent within it. Pye thus modifies Kamstra's definition to 'the temporary ambiguous coexistence of elements from diverse religions and other contexts within a coherent religious pattern' (1971:93). In a subsequent article Pye has developed the discussion, contrasting syncretism, which he regards as 'dynamically open', with synthesis, the production of a new religion, which is one possible resolution of the essentially temporary nature of syncretism, and one that is effectively irreversible (1993:6). Other possible resolutions are assimilation, which is the elimination of one element by the other, or dissolution, whereby the two strands drift apart (1971:92;1993:9).

Pye's definition of syncretism, which will be adopted here, suggests two useful areas of investigation with regard to the Kakure Kirishitan. First, its emphasis upon the temporary nature of syncretism allows the examination of the Kakure faith as the possible resolution of a temporary syncretism forced upon the underground church. Applying Pye's definition to the third of the theoretical models stated above, the Kakure Kirishitan could therefore represent a synthesis, a newly created religion with its own distinctive identity. Alternatively, both the second and third models could indicate an assimilation of weaker elements, Japanese in the first case, Christian in the second, by a more powerful tradition.

Secondly, having liberated syncretism from a purely negative connotation, Pye's definition allows the possibility of the Kakure Kirishitan being seen as a positive force for Christianity in Japanese society. Several commentators have stressed that once syncretism is liberated from its negative connotations it can become a powerful means for the spread of the gospel. Pannenberg, for example, studied syncretism by first looking at the notion of the 'purity' of religions. He identified two common assumptions: that the religions, before mixing, existed as pure types, and that such purity was worth striving for, whereas mixture was reprehensible. To Pannenberg:

... both assumptions are questionable. When a religious tradition combines with others, if it maintains itself as the dominant factor, it can express its assimilative and integrative power, while purity can mean sterility (1971:88)

Pannenberg regards the history of how Christianity came to dominate the Hellenistic world as showing that Christianity has a syncretic character in 'its inexhaustible assimilative and regenerative power'. This, according to Pannenberg, expresses not a weakness but the unique strength of Christianity (1971:88).⁸ This is, of course, a situation very different from that of the Kakure Kirishitan, for whom the comments of Thomas are more relevant. Thomas accepts a neutral definition of syncretism as the interpenetration between religions and between cultures, and expresses his enthusiasm for a 'Christ-centred syncretism', which 'would enable Christians to be open to interpenetration at cultural and religious levels, but with Jesus Christ as the principle of discrimination and coherence' (1985:393). However, both Pannenberg and Thomas

clearly recognise the importance of the power differential between Christianity and the culture within which this 'positive, Christ-centred syncretism' is to take place. It will be one of the tasks of this study to examine the balance of power between the underground church on the one hand, and indigenous Japanese religion on the other, to ask not only whether there is evidence for regarding the Kakure faith as a positive Christ-centred syncretism, but whether such a creation could even be possible in a situation of persecution and repression.

The final theoretical term used above is pluralism, which lays less stress upon the interpenetration of religions than upon their attitudes towards each other.⁹ Pluralism has been discussed by Peel, who makes the interesting suggestion that when individuals are not prepared to produce a syncretism in a formal and explicit way, they may instead follow the path of pluralism, which we may define as the continued coexistence of several distinct religious traditions, regardless of any blending between them. Peel rightly notes that the practice of pluralism can involve inconsistency, but 'for the ordinary man "cognitive dissonance" is the least of the troubles which a man might seek to avoid' (1979:129). We might add to that the case of the 'extra-ordinary' underground Christians of Japan, in their lives of fear and secrecy, but Peel goes on to suggest positive reasons why a pluralistic model may be adopted:

... they want clear and well-defined this-worldly goals, and they pursue whatever means they have any reason to suppose effective; the sources of spiritual power are manifold and none need be rejected. It is only where logical coherence, rather than practical efficacy, is the prime end of action, that an attempt will be made to create a new system of behaviour (1979:129–130)

As the aims of this work involve studying both the creation and the present expression of the Kakure faith, two complementary methodologies will be used: the historical, employing the documentary records, and the phenomenological, through fieldwork observations. As some of the latter exist in the form of historical records the two methodologies will overlap considerably. The phenomenological approach involves two principles of operation: the first being the suspension of judgement by the observer, and a recognition of any personal bias which might affect an objective conclusion.¹⁰ The study of the Kakure faith which follows will therefore not attempt an evaluation of the truth or otherwise of the

beliefs expressed and identified, nor will it attempt to make the Kakure faith fit into any preconceived notion of what it should be. The second principle has as its aim the search for the essence and structure of the religious phenomena through observation and description, but not 'mere description', rather an 'interpretive description, that nonetheless refrains from ontological explanations or ethical judgement' (Bowman 1992:1; Starkloff 1994:71). Such descriptions drawn from fieldwork form the basis for the analysis of the Kakure faith in terms of its theoretical dimensions (its myth, doctrine and dogmas), its practical dimensions (ritual and culture) and its social forms (community and social organisation), as one aspect of the process of 'exploring', 'interpreting' and 'portraying' a religion urged by Wach (1988:162).

Whereas the use of these two methodologies is intended to provide a thorough examination of the history and the structure of the Kakure faith, it is beyond the scope of the present study to attempt any form of quantitative or statistical analysis, obtained by such methods as questionnaires and surveys, of the beliefs expressed by its current adherents. It is recognised that the opinions and perceptions of the Kakure believers are a vital element in the material collected, but these are necessarily restricted. Those included here consist of points of clarification with regard to the perceived identity, and symbolic significance to the participants, of certain actions and objects. They also involve the participants' understanding of the intention and purpose of the rituals they are performing; and, to a more limited extent, their understanding of a doctrinal basis to such acts. These comments will be fully integrated into the fieldwork descriptions which follow, and are largely confined to interviews with the Kakure hierarchy, on whom falls the responsibility of maintaining and understanding their communities' traditions.

The historical and phenomenological data thus collected will provide material for two areas of comparison with the Kakure faith: the Catholicism of the 'Christian Century', and Japanese religion. Two assumptions are made. The first is that the Kakure Kirishitan faith has some form of direct relationship to the Christianity taken to Japan. This is an assumption that has not escaped criticism. Whelan has written that 'the religion of the Kakure Kirishitan, first of all, should not be compared with Christianity in its European form, but should be treated as a subject worthy of study in its own right' (1994:5). This statement betrays two levels of misconception. First, the two notions are by no means mutually exclusive, and in

these pages I shall indeed treat the subject as worthy of study in its own right and with the minimum of pre-conceived ideas, but to ignore both the historical dimension of that study and the obvious cultural links with European Christianity, would be to produce what Lévi-Strauss called 'an impoverished sociology, in which phenomena are set loose, as it were, from their foundations' (1967:19). Secondly, such comments display an ignorance of the true nature of the particular variety of European Christianity which was introduced to Japan. It was a form of Catholicism almost unrecognisable, or even unacceptable nowadays, in which popular beliefs mingled with official church teaching. The existence of these popular elements meant that the Catholicism taken to Japan by the Jesuits had more in common with indigenous Japanese religion than they realised, or would have been prepared to admit. I shall maintain, therefore, that it is essential to compare the Kakure faith with 'Christianity in its European form', as it must also be compared to Shintō and Buddhism, but that it must be compared to the right form of Christianity if the comparison is to be worthwhile.

The Japanese religious background to the Kakure faith

The second assumption that will be made is that the Kakure Kirishitan faith has been influenced by its contact with Japanese religion. This is an assumption that cannot seriously be questioned. The nature of Japanese religion has been summarized by such scholars as Kitagawa (1966;1987), Hori (1968), Earhart (1974), Kamstra (1990), Miyazaki (1992c) and Reader (1991a;1993), producing a number of key characteristics which will be covered in detail in the comparative studies which follow. Certain key points may be summarized here.

I begin with a particular characteristic of Japanese religion that is linked to the discussion earlier in this chapter. This is the view of Japanese religion as 'the classic case of syncretism' (Kamstra 1989:134), which allows us to use the term 'Japanese religion' as a legitimate acknowledgement that Japan's 'five formative traditions' (Shintō, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism and folk religion), have themselves been intermingled over the centuries to produce, if not a unified whole, then at least a system that can be understood as an entity (Earhart 1974:44). Hence the expression that the Japanese are 'born Shintō, and die Buddhist' (Reader 1991:55f), and even the founder of the esoteric Shingon sect of Buddhism in the ninth century AD put it under the protection of tutelary Shintō *kami*

(Shintō deities) (Kamstra 1989:138). For most of the time through which the underground church lived, the rulers of Japan recognized no difference between Shintō and Buddhism, each of which made its own contribution to the religious milieu along with the other traditions. For example, from Shintō came a stress on purification and the avoidance of pollution, which causes offence to the *kami* (Reader 1993:41), while the adoption of Confucian ethics provided the model for the Tokugawa state (Kitagawa 1966:153). Not only do the various religions mingle, but Japanese people and families have always participated in rituals from a number of different traditions (Reader 1993:40). Christianity alone resisted this tendency, an attitude which was partly to blame for its persecution. Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, for example, (quoted in Elison 1981:84) made the point by comparing Christianity with the experience of other foreign 'great traditions'. Confucius was transformed in the Japanese environment, so were the teachings of Buddha. Why then should the Christian god alone be exempt and untouched? It is a theme taken up more recently by the novelist Endō Shūsaku, and of all the images created of the history of Christianity in Japan few are as powerful as his vision of Japan as a mudswamp, in which the foreign plant of Christianity is doomed either to wither and die, or to be transformed out of all recognition.

One very important characteristic of Japanese religious belief and practice is that it is by no means a monotheistic system. Various shrines and temples appear to be dedicated to the inhabitants of a vast pantheon of gods. The numerous gods of Shintō are referred to as *kami*. As this crucial concept is difficult to define satisfactorily, a working definition which regards *kami* simply as 'the numinous entities which provide the focus for worship in Shintō' will suffice for the present discussion. There is clearly a circular aspect to this definition, but as the Japanese have historically been quite content to do without precise conceptions of what *kami* are, its very vagueness surely manages to express something of true *kami* nature (Harada 1926:26; Herbert 1967:23). It is also noticeable that a scholar such as Ono (1962:6) proceeds no further along the road of definition, but moves immediately to discuss varieties of *kami* and their associated mythology. Japanese religion is therefore polytheistic in nature, and is satisfied with only the most imprecise understanding of the nature of the deities who are its focus, a concept totally contrary to Western thought.

The willingness to accept different traditions is also recognizable in the attitude that Japanese religion is as much about doing as

about believing. There is a strong ritual basis to Japanese religion, in contrast to western views where doctrine is most important (Davis 1992:229). There is therefore a difference between Japanese religion and Christianity in the way religion is practised. Religion was not separated from everyday life in traditional Japan. There were rituals for planting rice and rituals for harvesting it, as well as a host of other activities. This close relationship between religion and daily life is still shown by the presence in homes of the *kamidana* (Shintō god shelf) and the *butsudan* (Buddhist altar), both of which provide a focus for offerings and prayers in short and simple daily religious rituals. There are no weekly religious services in temples and shrines. Instead people visit when they have a need for prayer, or on a number of special festival days. Many small Shintō shrines bear a dilapidated or unwanted look for much of the year, but are transformed on the days of their *matsuri* (festivals). Banners are hung at the *torii* (Shintō gateway), and the shrine's adherents celebrate, often carrying through the neighbourhood a portable shrine called an *omikoshi*. The scene can be raucous and colourful as the *omikoshi* is lugged or pulled along by scores of enthusiastic youths. As it passes peoples' houses the inhabitants come out to make offerings in return for blessings. There may then be dancing and feasting, but when the festival is over the shrine returns once again to its previous state of quiet anonymity. Even tiny wayside shrines, dedicated to *kami* whose identity has long been forgotten, will still receive offerings and visits, and are cleaned and maintained by local inhabitants.

The absence of a doctrinal base also means that Japanese religion cannot be subjected to the common Western criteria of logic based on the principle of non-contradictions (Kamstra 1989:136). Thus Japanese religion contains many internal inconsistencies, not the least of which are the vague identities of many *kami*. Such factors imply the absence, or at least the blurring, of the distinction found in Western society between what is religious and what is not. Under this heading may be placed the numerous elements of folk religion which have to do with prayers for worldly benefits, such as safe childbirth, and shrine visits by students to pray for success in examinations, along with the role played in this by charms and talismans such as *ema* and *o-mamori* (Holtom 1938; Swanger 1981; Reader 1991b). Such behaviours, which are linked to Taoist beliefs, permeate much of the activity associated with shrines and temples, and are closely tied in with another important concept in Japanese religion, that of mutual obligation, and the repaying of debt.

Success in business, therefore, may be regarded as one way in which the veneration given to the *kami* is repaid. Compared with Christianity, at least its modern, Reformed variety, Japanese religion is therefore explicitly magical, involving prayers for worldly benefits, good luck and personal achievement.¹¹

A further characteristic of Japanese religion is the emphasis upon the *ie* (household), rather than the individual, as the basic human religious unit. Unlike Western Christianity, where religion is regarded as a private matter of which the individual is the judge, the household is the basis of religious practice, as it is the basis of Japanese society (Hendry 1987:21).¹² There are Confucian elements here, with the emphasis upon *kō* (filial piety) as a basis of an ordered society (Hori 1968:10). Nor does this end with the death of a family member, for the most important way in which the primacy of the family is expressed in Japanese religion is the central place occupied by ancestor worship, whereby the structure of social relationships within the family unit is extended to encompass the dead. Thus Japanese ancestor worship does not constitute a separate religious cult, but being fully integrated into the wider religious systems of Shintō and Buddhism, ensures that death does not extinguish a person's involvement and participation in the life of his family. Instead, by a complex series of rituals designed to keep the ancestors peaceful and content in the successive stages through which they will pass, this continuity is assured.

Sources and previous work on the Kakure Kirishitan

The historical sources for this work are drawn from every century during which the process of evolution took place. The vast corpus of material associated with the introduction of Christianity into Japan, and its development during the years of success and freedom, will enable us to assess the input of doctrine and its interpretation until the time when persecution began. The primary material includes Jesuit letters and reports, published originally as the three series of *Cartas* noted in the bibliography, and most readily accessed through the four volumes in Japanese translated and edited by Murakami and Yanagiya (1968,1969). Secondary sources are such standard works in European languages as Boxer (1951), Schütte (1968,1975a), Drummond (1971), Elison (1973), Cooper (1965,1971,1974) Schurhammer (1982) and Moran (1993), as well as much Japanese material (e.g. that of Okada (1974) and Gonoï (1992)). The important comparative dimension of popular religious belief in contemporary Spain, Portugal and Italy will be explored through secondary works such

as Christian (1981), Gentilcore (1993) and Kamen (1993), and the topic of the missionaries' attitude towards their converts will also be given a careful comparative study by using material relating to Mexico and China (e.g. Ricard 1966; Gernet 1985).

Towards the end of this time of unrestricted missionary work we see the appearance of printed books in Japanese produced at the Jesuits' own press (Boxer 1951:190–198; Moran 1993:145). Certain of these productions are particularly relevant for the manner in which they were transmitted by the underground Christians, and for the use they made of them. Few copies survived the initial burning of books, and subsequent raids.¹³ Among the most important are different versions of the catechism, of which the earliest, the *Dochirina Kirishitan*, was published in Kazusa in 1591.¹⁴ An appendix to the 1592 version, a set of ten articles entitled 'various things a Christian must know', was copied separately, and entered firmly into the oral tradition of the underground church as the *Jikkajō* (ten chapters) and the *Jūikkajō* (eleven chapters, a reflection on the Eucharist having been added). It was so well established that Father Emile Raguét was able to publish the text according to a recitation of it made to him by the Christians of Ikitsuki nearly three centuries later (Laures 1957:85).

A further source for the comparative study of Kakure prayers is *Orashio no hon'yaku*, a combined prayer book and catechism, thought until its discovery in 1941 to have existed only as a handwritten copy (Laures 1957:64). Laures believes it to be identical to the 'book of all prayers' mentioned in an unpublished letter dated Nagasaki, October 25 1600 (1957:65). The work is particularly interesting as a handwritten version of it was among documents confiscated from Nagasaki Christians during the 1790s. Finally, we may note the existence of *Konchirisan no ryaku* (An Abridgement of Contrition) printed in 1603, and known to have been circulated in the form of several handwritten copies (Laures 1957:91). Records of the use of this shortened version of an Act of Contrition span the centuries of persecution. We hear of Arima Harunobu having it read to him as he faced execution in 1612 (1957:91; Pagés v.I 1869:209), and then note a copy being presented to Father Petitjean in 1865 by the Urakami Christians (Laures 1957:115). In addition to collections of prayers and catechisms, useful material may also be gleaned from works referring to Christian confraternities, some of which provided the framework for the underground church in the absence of priests. An example is the *Santa Maria no Mikumi no Okite* (Regulations for the Company of the Virgin Mary) by Antonio Janone (Kataoka 1974:32).

With the beginning of persecution the Jesuit letters gradually change from enthusiastic lists of numbers converted to terrible accounts of martyrdom. These acts set the scene for the decision to go underground, and provide the background to which the Christians carried on the faith. The lives of many of the martyrs are recorded in detail in the magisterial work of Pagés (1869–1870), which was based on original Japanese documents and is regarded as so authoritative that it has been translated into Japanese, and is often quoted by scholars of the period (e.g. Maruyama 1968; Turnbull 1993b:301). Pagés includes some of the martyrs later to be venerated by the Kakure, such as those who perished on the island of Nakae no shima (1869:493–4, 590–1) and the Nishi family (1869:179; Cieslik 1982). For others the only source is the oral tradition of the island and the associated monuments (Tagita 1954:325; Kondō 1977:353; Turnbull 1993b:298). A number of other valuable sources provide important evidence for the attitude towards martyrdom adopted by the Christians. These include letters from victims facing death (e.g. Pagés 1869 *Annexe* 29–32, 89–93), and three treatises on martyrdom: *Maruchirio no kagami* (Mirror of Martyrdom), which is an exhortatory account of the martyrdoms of St Anastasia, St Catherine and St Marina (Laures 1957:110; text in Anesaki 1925:140–171); *Maruchirio no susume* (Exhortation to martyrdom) probably of 1615 (Laures 1957:109; text in Anesaki 1925:173–228; English translation Anesaki 1931:16–40); and *Maruchirio no kokoro* (Readiness for martyrdom), a shorter work than the former, and with a note of urgency in its tone as it describes the behaviour which would be required should Christians be called upon to die for their faith (Laures 1957:109; text in Anesaki 1925:229–239; English translation Anesaki 1931:40–46). As will be discussed later, this little document, a copy of which was confiscated in 1790, may be regarded as a blueprint for the underground life, setting out the acceptable limits of denial and concealment.

As noted earlier, several of the documents mentioned above exist as copies confiscated by investigating magistrates, and it is in the records of such investigations that we find further source materials for the development of the underground faith. These include information on the methods of investigation, which related directly to what were perceived as Christian practices, such as sections of the *Kirishito-ki* (majority of the text in Anesaki 1925:39–104; part in English translation in Alison 1973:204–207). It also contains general information on Christian belief, some of which was based on that provided by apostate Christians (Anesaki 1925:92–96) and a