Early Missionaries in Japan 6

Soldo Organtino: The Architect of the Japanese Mission HUBERT CIESLIK, S.J.

(An article from Francis Britto's All about Francis Xavier)

Unquestionably the most popular of the early Jesuit missionaries in Japan was Father Organtino (1533-1609). Gifted, endowed with a pleasing personality and knowing the language and customs of Japan better than most, he won the affection of the people he dealt with to an unusual degree. During the more than three decades he spent as a missionary in the Kyoto area he also carried out the policy of adaptation which he had inherited from Vilela and Frois to its greatest degree of perfection. He was on terms of familiarity with all the great ones of his day in Japan and his memory survived among the people long after the missions had been destroyed.

(1) EARLY APOSTOLATE

Father Organtino Soldo Gnecchi was a native of Astro near Brescia in northern Italy. He was born in 1533. He entered the Society of Jesus in 1555 and served for a time as Rector of the College in Loreto but was named head of St. Paul's College in Goa in 1567 and was transferred to Japan, in the following year.

In Macao, he met Father Francis Cabral and made the rest of the journey together with him. They landed on June 18, 1570, at Shiki on the Island of Amakusa where Father Vilela was then in charge of the mission. Father Cabral who had been named Superior of the mission a short time before, made a quick visit to Kuchinotsu and Nagasaki and then called all the missionaries of Shimo (Kyushu) together for a meeting at Shiki towards the end of July. This meeting lasted for thirty days during which Father Cabral outlined his plans and instituted a number of reforms. Since a number of the changes he made were based on pre-conceived notions, they represented a real danger for the future of the mission, but it must be admitted that the closely-knit organization he built up prepared the way for great outward developments in the mission.

It was during the Shiki meeting that Cabral gave Organtino his assignment to Kyoto, where Frois had been working alone for seven years since Vilela's departure from that area. Organtino therefore set out for Kyoto during the course of that same year.

The choice of Organtino for this important post was a happy one. Under the guidance of Frois he was able to learn both the language and customs of the people and was thus prepared to continue and perfect the system of adaptation which had been inaugurated by Vilela and Frois. When Frois was recalled to Kyushu in 1576 it was Organtino who directed

the fortunes of the Kyoto missions until 1587 when Hideyoshi issued his Edict of Proscription.

As in the case of all the other missionaries, the early years were devoted to an intensive study of the language and customs of the people and Frois took pains to show his assistant all the cultural monuments of the city. During the years 1573 and 1574 both of the missionaries also devoted much time to the study of the Hokke-kyō under the direction of a

former bonze.

There were, of course, some exciting days too. Organtino had been in Kyoto only a matter of months when Wada Koremasa, the great friend and protector of the mission was killed in battle. Frois was out on a mission trip at the time and Organtino found himself alone at the mission in company with Brother Lourenço. The two of them immediately brought their religious articles to a place of safety. Frois returned to the city in haste and forthwith sent Brother Lourenço to Nobunaga who was then leading his troops in an attack on the mighty warrior bonzes of Mount Hiei. Nobunaga again promised his protection and thus eliminated the greatest danger.

During the same year, Cabral also came to Kyoto for his first visitation and was introduced to Nobunaga, who



1. Majestic Mount Fuji

was then in his own residence in Gifu. Organtino at that time remained in Kyoto but later accompanied Cabral and Frois when they had their audience with the Shogun, Yoshiaki.

Organtino, meanwhile, had made such good progress in the language that he was able to start actual mission work. He set out on November 8, 1572, in company with Brother Lourenjo for Sunga in Kawachi where he baptized about fifteen samurai at Christmas time. At the request of the Christian lord of the place, Sancho Sanga, he remained there until Easter of the following year. By this time he was able not only to hear confessions in Japanese but

was able also to give two lessons in the catechism every day. Concerning the Easter festivities he himself wrote to Father Frois:

On Easter Sunday we had a pre-dawn torch procession to cross, during the which Matthew played the violin, while we and the sang. Christians Everyone was happy and all of the non-Christians of Sanga came to look on. After our return, **Brother** Lourenço gave them a sermon while I celebrated a



2. A Bamboo forest

High Mass and distributed Holy Communion. It was certainly a happy occasion for all of us. The lord of Sanga provided a meal for all of the Christians who had come from Sakai and the other castles of the neighborhood. After the people had eaten, the lord of Sanga had the fishing boats assemble and had four of them fastened together with bamboo poles. After a platform had been constructed over these four boats, a shelter similar to two rooms was also erected there with comfortable seats, and we were invited to take our places there so that we could follow the other 200 fishing boats and watch them at their work. From this vantage point we also saw a troop of 500 soldiers from Sakai who were passing at the foot of Mount Iimori to help out at the castle of Yodo. Thereupon our 'houseboat' returned to the church, where the Christians staged a play and sang hymns according to their own customs while the lord of Sanga provided them constantly with refreshments. About 3,000 non-Christians had also come from all directions to look on.

While Organtino was in Sanga, new troubles threatened in Kyoto. The Shogun Toshiaki, who had been installed by Nobunaga, was dissatisfied with being merely a puppet in the hands of Nobunaga and had allied himself with the latter's enemies. Fighting broke out early in 1573, and, as a result, many of the palaces and the temples were burned to the ground. Father Frois and Brother Cosmas rushed the religious articles to a place of safety, but the church buildings were happily saved from destruction, as were also the houses of most of the Christians. With the defeat and flight of Yoshiaki, peace was restored for a time in this war-ridden country.

When most of the city was rebuilt after these troubles and when new palaces and temples arose everywhere, the missionaries felt that the time had come for the erection of a really presentable church in the city. Nearly fifteen years had elapsed since the establishment of the mission and many of the leading members of the nobility had been converted and had erected beautiful chapels in their castles. The church in the capital city, however, was still housed in the dilapidated building which Vilela had bought in 1560 in the lower city. Of its four supporting beams, three had split while the fourth was leaning to one side.

After consultation with the Christians, therefore, Organtino together with Dario Takayama and the other Christian noblemen drew up a plan for a new church. It was Organtino himself, who evidently knew something about architecture, who supervised the building operations as he did later when the college was being built at Azuchi. It might be remarked in passing that several of Organtino's Japanese letters are still extant and contain various details concerning roof tiles etc. Meanwhile, the Christian nobles vied with one another in having valuable building materials brought in from the various provinces.

Special difficulties arose from the fact that Nobunaga had taken exclusive control of wood imports to the city in favor of the palace he was building and had commandeered all the available carpenters. Thanks, however, to the kindly interest of Murai Sadakatsu, the Governor of the city, a special permit had been obtained for the building of the church and Murai himself helped the priests, came to see what progress they were making, detailed the necessary workmen for their building and even gave them an appreciable sum of money.

Other difficulties came from the hostility of some Buddhist neighbors. Since the priests' property was too small they had decided to put up a three storey building. Permission for this had been obtained both from Nobunaga and the Governor of the city, but the neighbors objected that this was against Japanese custom, that the church would be higher than the Buddhist temple, and that people looking out from the third storey of the building would able to see what was going on in the neighboring houses and gardens. Spokesmen for the neighborhood made representations to the Governor and even went to Gifu to protest to Nobunaga in person but were not able to accomplish anything. When the neighbors then saw that the Governor himself had sent 1000 men to help with the work of setting up the huge beams for the new church, they decided that it was time to change their policy and even lent a helping hand themselves.

Christmas 1576 saw the arrival from Bungo of Father Stefanoni, who had come to replace Father Frois. Since the church was nearing completion, the priests decided to celebrate the Feast with a Solemn High Mass, the first ever celebrated in Kyoto. The church itself was dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption by Father Organtino on August 15, 1577, in memory of St. Francis Xavier's arrival in Japan on that feast day in 1549.

The dedication ceremony developed into a large Catholic demonstration as the Christian noblemen came in from all directions together with their retainers dressed in festive attire. The Takayama group from Takatsuki included no less than 200 persons. Many went to confession and received Holy Communion, and the festivities were carried on all through the day with many non-Christians also looking on. The church thus became one of the 'sights' of the city and attracted many of the curious even from the surrounding districts. The priests naturally tried to make the most of it and in showing their visitors around not only explained the pictures and church furnishings but also gave explanations of the Church's teachings. In this way, the dedication of the church became the starting point for a new movement which resulted in many conversions.

Organtino was particularly successful in enlisting the sympathies of Nobunaga, visited the warlord often, and each of these visits tended to strengthen the friendship between the two men. As a result of this friendship, Nobunaga as well as his generals came to have a



3. A Japanese scene

real admiration for the Church and Nobunaga's sons also began cultivate intimate relations with the priests showed a interest in the teachings of Christianity. They continued to maintain these friendly relations even after the death of their father, and Father Organtino was able in 1585 to baptize Nobuo, second son the

Nobunaga along with one of his cousins. Ten years later, two sons of Nobunaga's oldest son, Hidenobu and Hidenori, were also baptized.

Nobunaga's friendship for the Church was put to a serious test in 1579, when Araki Murashige, the immediate overlord of the two Takayamas in Takatsuki allied himself with the enemies of Nobunaga. Takayama Ukon had done all in his power to dissuade Araki from such an undertaking, but his efforts were fruitless, and when war broke out, the Takayamas also found themselves at war with Nobunaga.

Organtino feared the worst for the Church since the Takayamas were the most earnest of the Christians and the principal support of the mission. He, therefore, went in haste to Takatsuki and pointed out to Takayama Ukon that Araki was a rebel and that the Takayamas ware bound in conscience to remain faithful to Nobunaga. Ukon admitted the validity of the priest's reasoning and was willing to do whatever was required of him in conscience. He was in a quandary, however, since his sister and his young son were held hostages by Araki.

Takatsuki was the gateway to the province of Settsu, and it was essential to Nobunaga's interests that he kept control of the area. He, therefore, asked Organtino repeatedly to use his influence with the Takayamas to get them to surrender their castle to him. All of Organtino's efforts, however, were defeated by the obstinate opposition of the elder Takayama, and Nobunaga therefore gave orders that Father Stefanoni, Brother Lourenço and two of the *Dojuku* (mission assistants) should be taken to Nagahara and kept there. The Takayamas, therefore, tried once more to get Araki to yield, but their efforts failed because Nobunaga insisted on unconditional surrender.

Since Organtino had failed in his negotiations, Nobunaga had him and the leading Christians brought to his own camp, and the priest feared that the warlord would wreak terrible vengeance on the Church once the troubles were over. He, therefore, decided to make another desperate effort and himself went to Takatsuki in the guise of a refugee. He was cordially welcomed by the Christians but soon noticed that the opposition stemmed from the older Takayama, who refused to consider any kind of mediation.

Takayama Ukon, meanwhile, was sorely disturbed in conscience. On the one hand, he had to consider his obligations towards Nobunaga and the welfare of the Church. On the other hand, it was impossible for him forget the hostages in Araki's hands or the opposition of his own father. Under such circumstances, most Japanese noblemen would have sought a solution in *harakiri* ('ritual suicide'), but for Ukon this solution was forbidden by his Christian conscience. After much prayer and meditation, he finally found a solution and one which reveals the depths of his Christian convictions. He decided to resign as lord of Takatsuki and to restore all of his rights to his father.

After talking the matter over with Organtino, he wrote out a complete explanation for his father and left the castle at night in company with the priest and a few of his closest followers. Only after they had proceeded some distance did he explain his plan even to them and then he cut off his own hair, surrendered his swords to his retainers, said goodbye to them and went on with Organtino to Nobunaga's camp.

When the elder Takayama received Ukon's letter on the following morning, he was beside himself with rage. Most of the samurai, however, refused to obey his orders and all he could do was to betake himself to Araki to explain the whole situation. Since Araki could not blame him for the fall of the castle, he could not wreak vengeance on his hostages and thus their lives were saved.

When Ukon and Organtino arrived at Nobunaga's camp, they were received with open arms. Ukon was pardoned and was given new swords, and after the war was ended, his revenue in Takatsuki was increased by one-half. His father, Darius, however, had to go into exile in Kitanoshō (now Fukui), but he was allowed to go about freely again after some time and devoted his whole time to works of the apostolate. He thus became the founder of the Church in the province of Echizen.

(2) GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

After Nobunaga's successful campaign, his relations with Organtino became more cordial than ever. As early as 1576, he had begun to erect a splendid new residence at Azuchi on Lake Biwa and demanded that all the Daimyos should erect houses for themselves on a proportionate scale in the new city. The city was thus to become one of great splendor, and Nobunaga insisted that all of the daimyos should spend at least part of each year there. This plan, which was later referred to as *Sankin-Kōtai*, was adopted and developed with great success by the Tokugawa in their new capital in Edo (Tokyo).

When Nobunaga's palace was completed he opened it for public inspection and vast numbers assembled to view its fabulous splendor. Nobunaga was greatly pleased when Organtino and his confreres also came, and he personally conducted them around to show them everything. Organtino took this occasion to ask permission for the erection of a church in the city. Since the nobles from all parts of the country were to assemble in Azuchi and spend at least a part of their time there, Fr. Organtino felt that a mission in this city would have unparalleled opportunities for spreading the Faith far and wide.

Nobunaga was enthusiastic about the plan and offered to give the priest one of the old temples of the Nichiren sect. The priest, however, felt that this would arouse the enmity of the bonze and therefore asked for a different site on the shore of the lake. This, also, Nobunaga gladly granted on the Feast of Pentecost in 1580.

Organtino took steps immediately for the establishment of the new mission. He had been ordered by the Visitator¹, Father Valignano, to establish a seminary for young nobles and had already assembled much building material for a 34 room structure in Kyoto. The Christian nobles now urged him to erect the seminary in Azuchi instead and themselves volunteered to provide the money and workers needed to haul the materials to Azuchi. Thus it happened that a three storey building was erected within the brief period of one month and so stately was the new structure that it excited the admiration of all who saw it. The first floor was taken up with reception rooms and a room for the tea ceremony while the second floor was reserved as a residence for the priests and the third floor as a dormitory for the students.

With his seminary completed, Organtino was confronted with the task of finding students to occupy it. This was not easy since the seminary represented something that was completely new, and it was not likely that many of the parents would send their sons to such a school especially since the students were to cut their hair short after the manner of the bonzes. The clever priest therefore resorted to a ruse which would probably not meet with the



4. Remains of the Organtino Seminary

approval of modern pedagogues. He invited a whole group of .young nobles for a visit during which he brought the full charm of his personality to bear upon them and spoke so enthusiastically about the nature and scope of the seminary that all of them decided to stay there.

Organtino then wrote a letter to Takayama Ukon to explain what had happened. After reading this letter, Takayama, who was then conversing with a number of his vassals, praised the seminary highly and promised 200 *koku* (about 180 liters) of rice for the support of each of the students. With their overlord taking such a stand, none of the vassals dared say a word against the school or against Organtino. One of the students, incidentally, was young Paul Miki who later entered the Society of Jesus and died as one of the Twenty-Six sainted Martyrs.

Nobunaga also took great interest in the seminary and visited the place repeatedly. So cordial, indeed, ware the relations between Nobunaga and the priests that they visited him every two weeks and were invited by him to the palace at other times also. He often spoke with them for hours at a time and showed great interest not only in everything pertaining to Western culture but also to the Christian religion. In his optimism, Organtino liked to think that Nobunaga also would be baptized but it is hardly probable that the warlord was ever sufficiently interested in that.

Seeing that their overlord was so favorable to Christianity, many of the nobles often visited the priests, listened to their sermons and not a few of them were baptized. Oda

Nobutaka, the eldest son of Nobunaga, also invited Organtino to his residence in Gifu and asked him to establish a mission there.

When the Visitator, Father Valignano, arrived in the Kyoto area in 1581, Organtino and his seminarians went to meet him on the way. At Takatsuki the seminarians added much to the Holy Week ceremonies by their excellent singing.

With the Holy Week and Easter ceremonies completed, Valignano set out on Easter Monday for Kyoto where Organtino introduced him to Nobunaga in the Honnoji on the following day. We have already seen how deeply impressed Valignano was by his visit to the Kyoto area and how this visit strengthened his decision to go ahead with his policy of adaptation.

Valignano was enthusiastic about the prospects for the mission and promised to do what he could to bring in more missionaries. He placed Father Organtino in charge of the seminary in Azuchi while Frois was to take temporary charge of his old mission in Kyoto. The records for the following year, 1582, show that there were five priests, seven Brothers along with many catechists and other lay helpers (*Dojuku*) in the Kyoto area stationed (l) in Azuchi, (2) Kyoto, (3) Gifu, and (4) Sakai.

As is well known, the mission in Azuchi was of short duration. Nobunaga was killed in June, 1582, by the treacherous general Akechi Mitsuhide, whose troops then sacked Azuchi as well as the seminary. Organtino, together with his confreres and the seminarians, took refuge on an island in Lake Biwa but were robbed of most of their belonging by the man who had taken them there under a pretense of friendship and protection.

Rescued from the island by an acquaintance who was in the employ of Akechi, the missionaries were taken to Sakamoto. There, Organtino was met by a messenger of Akechi, who asked him to use his influence to prevail upon Takayama Ukon to join forces with the rebels. To escape from this predicament, Organtino did pass on Akechi's message in a Japanese letter to Ukon, but added another letter in Portuguese in which he warned his friend not to do anything that would be against his conscience. From this it is evident that Takayama Ukon also understood Portuguese.

Armed with a letter of safe-conduct from a son of Akechi, Organtino together with his entire group proceeded to Kyoto, where he did the best he could under the circumstances to carry on his seminary work within the narrow confines of the mission.

Akechi himself was defeated in battle by Takayama Ukon and was killed by some farmers while trying to escape. Before long, the other rebels were also routed and with peace restored the generals of Nobunaga assembled to choose his successor. At this meeting Hashiba Hideyoshi, later known as Toyotomi Hideyoshi, found ways and means of excluding both of Nobunaga's sons and having Hidenobu, the one year old son of Nobutada chosen in the place of his grandfather. This child, of course, was nothing but a puppet, and Hideyoshi as the mightiest of the generals was thus able to centralize all power in his own hands.

During the war that followed upon the death of Nobunaga, many of the churches were destroyed, and a number of the Christian daimyos were transferred to other fiefs. Under these circumstances, the domain of Takayama Ukon in Takatsuki became the principal refuge of all the Christians in the area. Since the building in Azuchi had also been lost, Takayama

invited Organtino together with the other missionaries and the seminarians to Takatsuki where he placed suitable buildings and a chapel at their disposal and also erected a fine new church in 1585. He likewise provided for most of the material needs of the seminary.

Thanks to these arrangements, the seminary flourished once more with thirty students in attendance. Most of these boys represented families of the highest nobility, and in 1583 a prince of the Imperial family was also admitted. During the course of that year several of the boys also asked to be admitted to the novitiate of the Society of Jesus.

Hideyoshi had meanwhile begun to erect a splendid palace for himself in Osaka. Takayama Ukon, who knew Hideyoshi well and knew also how vain the man was, urged Organtino to put in a. bid as soon as possible for enough ground in Osaka for the establishment of a mission there. When the priest, therefore, visited Hideyoshi in September, 1583, in company with Brother Lourenço to present his petition, he was well received and immediately obtained a grant of a very fine piece of ground. Present for this audience were



5. Takayama Ukon

two other prominent Christians, Konishi Yukinaga, who was then Treasurer to Hideyoshi, and Ai Ryosa, who served him as secretary. After the audience, Hideyoshi himself went with Brother Lourenço to see the property and to have it surveyed properly.

As a result of these negotiations, the church of Okayama was now transferred to Osaka, and Takayama Ukon built a residence there for the priests at his own expense. Mass was said in the new church for the first time on Christmas Day, 1583. Thanks to this new mission, conversions multiplied in Osaka also, especially among the nobles, many of whom now congregated in that city. It was here also that Organtino began to cultivate friendly relations with Hideyoshi—relations which stood the Church in good stead down to the time of Hideyoshi's Edict of Proscription.

A number of prominent men whose

names still loom large in the historical books of today were baptized in Osaka in the course of this year. Foremost among them were Gamō Ujisato and Kuroda Yoshitaka (Josui). These men together with Konishi Yukimaga and Takayama Ukon were probably the most important of the Christian daimyos and also ranked among the most intimate fiends and capable generals of Hideyoshi.

Takayama Ukon was transferred to Akashi in October 1585. His new fief was larger than Takatsuki, and the annual income he now received was fifty percent higher than his previous income. For the mission, however, Takayama's transfer represented a distinct loss

though Hideyoshi had guaranteed religious liberty to the Christians in Takatsuki. Father Organtino also permitted Father Fornaletto and Brother Vincent along with a number of lay helpers to remain in Takatsuki in order to take care of the spiritual needs of the Christians, but he transferred the seminary to Osaka, where it remained until it was suppressed in 1587.

(3) A TIME OF CRISIS

The years immediately preceding the Edict of Proscription issued in 1587 were the most glorious in the history of the Kyoto mission. Since Hideyoshi was on friendly terms with the missionaries and since many of the most prominent men of his entourage were Christians, it was 'good form' for people to become Catholics. People in the 'social set' were more or less behind the times if they had not gone to church at least once and listened to a sermon. It was common also, in Osaka and Kyoto, to see Japanese nobles strutting about in pantaloons and flowing mantles after the manner of the Portuguese Hidalgos and many even among the non-Christians wore crosses and rosaries suspended from their necks. Even Hideyoshi occasionally wore such a rosary.

It was Organtino who was the first to notice the signs of the storm to come. Shimazu Yoshihisa, the mighty lord of Satsuma, had already conquered most of Kyushu and it was inevitable that he should become engaged in a life and death struggle with Otomo, the lord of Bungo. Hideyoshi was, of course, watching the developments with the closest attention and was waiting for a chance to intervene and thus get control of southern Japan.

Since his son was incapable, the aged Omoto Sōrin had again taken charge in Bungo. Seeing the dangers that threatened from Shimazu, Otomo Shōrin paid a visit to Hideyoshi in Osaka in 1586 in order to ask his help. The Vice-Provincial, Father Coelho, also went to Osaka and was received in solemn audience by Hideyoshi on May 4. Organtino was deeply concerned over this



6. A Japanese scene

fact since he knew that Father Coelho liked to mix politics with religion, and he knew full well that such a policy could easily arouse the anger of the proud and hot-tempered Hideyoshi.

Organtino, therefore, volunteered to act as interpreter in the hope that he might be able to steer the conversation away from any dangerous subject. Coelho, however, declined

the offer and instead asked the help of Father Frois, who was simple and naive enough to allow himself to be drawn into the warlike plans of the Vice-Provincial.

The audience itself took place in the usual stiff and formal manner, but after its close Hideyoshi invited the priests to go along with him to another part of the palace, where he praised the work of the missionaries in the most extravagant terms. Organtino and Takayama Ukon were present for this conversation, in which Hideyoshi began to speak of his plans for Kyushu and even touched upon his scheme for the conquest of the whole of China. He added that when that was accomplished he would invite the priests to go to China and would prevail upon all the Chinese to embrace Christianity!

Coelho was enthused over the friendliness and cordiality of the dictator, and while they were talking about Kyushu, he volunteered to serve as a mediator between Hideyoshi and the Christian Daimyos in Kyushu and promised also to obtain two big ships from the Portuguese. Both Organtino and Takayama Ukon were deeply alarmed then they heard Father Coelho talk in this wise and sought several times to change the subject but neither the Vice-Provincial nor Frois could be diverted from their course.

After the audience, Frois wrote a glowing report about it, but Ai, the Christian secretary of Hideyoshi, and the other Christians at court were deeply worried about it. Hideyoshi himself had given no hint of any trouble ahead, but his excessive cordiality and the flattery of the ex-bonze Seyakuin, who was an intimate friend of Hideyoshi and a staunch opponent of the Christians, aroused the suspicions of the cooler heads among the Christians.

It is true that the Church continued for some time to make good progress. While Coelho was still in Osaka, Ukita Hideie, the daimyo of Okyama and Hizen, had promised to erect a church in his own city. Thanks to the prudent negotiations of Kuroda Yoshitaka, Mōri Terumoto also permitted the reopening of the mission in Yamaguchi. During Coelho's return journey, Mori's uncle, Kobayakawa Takakage also received him most cordially in Iyo (Shikoku) and granted permission for the establishment of a mission in his domain. Genuinely apostolic work was done also by Hideyoshi's Christian generals during the Kyushu campaign in the following year and so zealous in this respect was Kuroda Yoshitaka that he was said to have a sword in one hand and a cross in the other.

Scarcely had the Kyushu campaign ended when the storm broke. It would take too long to discuss all the details and the reasons for Hideyohi's change of policy but it must be admitted that Coelho's imprudent meddling on several occasions during the course of the campaign made Hideyoshi more and more suspicious.

The change came in the wake of the conference held by the victors in Hakata (Fukuoka) and was all the more surprising because the Christian daimyos had fared not at all badly at that conference. While still in Hakata, Hideyoshi suddenly issued his notorious decree of expulsion during the night of July 24, 1857. Christianity was proscribed, the churches were to be destroyed, the priests banished within twenty days, and Takayalna Ukon was deprived of his fief.

When Coelho pointed out that there would be no ship sailing for Macao for another six months and that it was therefore impossible for the priests to depart within twenty days, Hideyoshi ordered all of them to assemble in Hirado and wait there for the next ship. Coelho,

therefore, sent word to all of the missionaries, inviting them to assemble at the port indicated by Hideyoshi but let it be known that if some of those who were working in central Japan or in Bungo had a chance to remain there in hiding they were free to do so.

The priests in central Japan, therefore, gave final directions to their Christians on how they should practice their faith and then proceeded to the port city of Muro which was situated in the domain of Konishi. En route, Organtino also visited the Christians in Takatsuki to bid them farewell and then went on to Muro where he hoped to find some place where he could hide.

His reception in Muro was very cool. Even Konishi, who was then staying in Sakai, had been intimidated and refused to accept a letter which Organtino had written to him to ask him to come to Muro. Only when Organtino threatened to go to Sakai in person did Konishi decide to see him in Muro, and then Organtino found it difficult to get him to take a firmer attitude. In the end, Organtino threatened to go in person to Kyoto or Osaka to beg publicly in the streets for some kind of lodging since, as he said, it ill became the Catholics to turn their backs and flee during the first skirmish with the devil.

Weeping, Konishi withdrew without a word and closeted himself for three hours with his friend. George Yuki Yaheiji. At the end of that time he had made his decision, went to confession and offered Organtino a hiding place on the island of Shodoshima, which was a part of his domain and promised to provide all that was needed for his support. Konishi kept his word, and from that time on he was the main support of the Church down to the time of his tragic death in 1600.

Organtino went to Shodoshima, an island in the Inland Sea southeast of Okayama, where Takayama Ukon had also found a hiding place. This hiding place was situated near a mountain village, and only a very few Christians who had been asked to provide all that was needed for the refugees knew about the priest's presence. The Christian governor of the island also took such stringent measures to preserve the secret that not even Hideyoshi's spies were



7. A Japanese scene

able to ferret out any information about the whereabouts of Organtino and Takayama Ukon.

Even at this time Organtino did the best he could to care for the spiritual needs of the bereaved christianities in Central Japan. At least on one occasion he left his hiding place—disguised as a Japanese, and traveling in a closed sedan chair—and succeeded in visiting practically all of the

parishes. So completely was the secret kept that not even the carriers of the chair knew who their passenger was. During the day, he said Mass for the Christians and heard their

confessions and gave them a sermon during the night. He never stayed in the same place more than one day, however, lest his hosts should be in any way endangered.

This secret apostolate could not, however, be carried on very long. Konishi was transferred to Higo in July, 1588, which meant that Shodoshima was entrusted to a different overlord. Takayama Ukon also went to Higo with Konishi, but since his presence was discovered by Hideyoshi's minions, he was exiled to Kanazawa. Organtino, on the other hand, was recalled to Kyushu by Father Coelho and there was given a chance to rest up after his arduous labors.

It may be recalled that the Jesuit Visitator, Father Valignano, arrived in Nagasaki for the second tine on July 21, 1590. This time, of course, he came as an ambassador of the Viceroy in India, and he hoped in this capacity to be able to meet Hideyoshi and to obtain the revocation of Hideyoshi's edict of 1587. Hideyoshi did indeed promise to receive the ambassador, but new difficulties were being constantly put in the way of such a meeting and Valignano finally sent Organtino to Kyoto to get his friends there to do what they could to speed up the negotiations.

Thanks especially to the influence of Kuroda and Masuda, Organtino was thus able to remove all of the obstacles with the result that Valignano together with his whole entourage was able to proceed to Kyoto. The audience took place there on March 3, 1591, and it was but natural that Organtino, too, should be present.

It is true that Valignano was unable to obtain the revocation of the 1587 Edict since Hideyoshi had stipulated that this subject should not be discussed in the audience. The results, nevertheless, were good. After four years, a priest had been admitted to Hideyoshi's presence, and Valignano was permitted to go wherever he wished in Japan until the official reply to the Viceroy could be drawn up. Valignano, of course, made the most of this opportunity with the result that he and the other priests managed to visit all the parishes of Central Japan and in each case these visits turned out to be the equivalent of a parish mission.

Relying on the friendship of Maeda Munehisa, who was then governor of Kyoto City, Valignano allowed Fathers Organtino and Francis Perez to remain there together with three Japanese Brothers and these priests were thus enabled to resume a very cautious but effective apostolate there.

After Valignano's departure, Kuroda Yoshitaka informed Hidetsugu, the oldest son of Hideyoshi who had succeeded his father as Kampaku, that Father Organtino was again living in Kyoto. Hidetsugu was not only well acquainted but also very well disposed towards Organtino and not only promised him protection but also sent him 200 bags of rice for his support. He wanted to do even more for the priest, but Organtino declined for fear that Hideyoshi's anger should be aroused again. After some tine, Maeda, the Governor of the city, also obtained permission from Hideyoshi for Organtino, as "an old and feeble man," to remain in the city and move about there at will.

This "old and feeble man," however, was not inactive, and the wheels of mission work were soon in motion again, though everything had to be done, of course, with the utmost of prudence. The Jesuits owned four houses in Kyoto, and the priests elected to live in the one which was the most retired and hidden. To allay suspicion, the Christians were allowed to

meet only in small groups, and Mass itself was not celebrated publicly at the priests' residence, but was said successively in the homes of various Christians. During the persecution, the Christians had been divided into small groups who were expected to meet every Sunday for spiritual reading in common, and for a talk that followed upon the reading. This system was still maintained but the sermons were now given by one of the Brothers and the priests said Mass only once a month in each of the groups.

The Catalogus of the Society of Jesus for 1592 has a note saying that aside from the two priests mentioned above, there were three Brothers in Kyoto, viz., Brothers Paul of Vincent, Amakusa and John Mori. The Catalogus also says that there 15,000 were some Christians in the various provinces of the



8. A Japanese scene

Kyoto area, that they were living under a regime of persecution, that there were no churches, and that the priests were in hiding.

Busy days were ahead for the missionaries when all the daimyos were called upon in 1594 and 1595 to send men in to work for the construction of the new residence in Fushimi. Many of the old Christians, who had been deprived of all religious ministrations since the Decree of 1587, now went to Kyoto, or to Osaka where the Jesuits also had a house again, in order to see the priests and to receive the Sacraments. Not a few non-Christians came, too, to hear the sermons and there were a number of notable conversions. In 1594 Organtino himself baptized no less than 500 persons in Kyoto and the surrounding districts. This movement continued during the following years also and the converts baptized at that time included the sons of Maeda, the Governor of Kyoto, and the two grandsons of Oda Nobunaga.

Storm clouds were gathering again, however, on the horizon. The Spanish ship *San Felipe* was cast ashore on the island of Shikoku in October, 1596. The political repercussions of this incident were too complicated to be discussed here, but it is certain that the incident again aroused the anger of Hideyoshi, who was urged on also by Seyakuin, the longtime adversary of the Christians. Whether the Spanish pilot ever made any such accusation or not, it is certain that Hideyoshi accused the missionaries of being spies for Spain and that they were aiming at nothing less than the conquest of Japan. He added that since he had already proscribed Christianity, he now wished to reinforce that decree and gave orders that all of the missionaries, Jesuits and Franciscans alike, should be crucified in Nagasaki.

These orders for the execution of the missionaries were given on December 8. Guards were now set around the houses of the Jesuits in Kyoto and Osaka and a list of the principal Christians was drawn up. Thanks to the efforts of Ishida Mitsunari, the Governor of the city, it was possible to get most of the names taken off this list and to get the penalty of mutilation cancelled to a great extent. The final list of those condemned included six Franciscans, the Jesuit, Father Paul Miki, two *dojuku* (catechists who were allowed to take their vows before death and thus died as members of the Society of Jesus) and 17 lay Catholics. These were all taken from Kyoto to Nagasaki and were crucified there on the hill of Nishizaka on February 5, 1597. They are the Twenty-Six Martyrs who were canonized by Pope Pius IX in 1862.

In the following March, Hideyoshi gave orders that all of the Jesuits with two or three exceptions, were to be banished from Japan. It was indeed possible to delay the execution of these orders, but most of the churches were destroyed, the colleges were suppressed and, if Hideyoshi had not died in the following year, it is most probable that the missionaries would have been forced to go.

Though Organtino and the other priests in the Kyoto area had escaped the sentence of death, they were advised by Ishida Mitsunari, the Governor of the city, to retire to Nagasaki since he could no longer guarantee their safety. Under the circumstances, the only thing Organtino could do was to accept this advice and act accordingly.

(4) LAST YEARS AND DEATH

After the death of Hideyoshi, the priests still remained in Nagasaki to see what would happen but then began gradually to go back to their various missions. Organtino also, in spite of his age, was anxious to get back to work and left for Kyoto during that same year.

Organtino's return to Kyoto infuriated Terasama Shima-no-kami, the governor of Nagasaki, who had greatly molested the Christians in his district and feared that Organtino, who had so many prominent friends in Kyoto, might stir up trouble for him there. He, therefore, demanded that Organtino return to Nagasaki immediately and threatened to avenge himself on the local Christians if the priest refused to do so. Terasawa himself was in Kyoto at the moment but to lend force to his threat he sent orders to his subordinates in Nagasaki to keep all the Catholics there from going to church.

Under the circumstances, the priests in Nagasaki decided to move the college and seminary from Nagasaki to the island of Amakusa, and both Bishop Cerqueira and the Visitator, Father Valignano, took refuge there too. At the same time, Valignano sent Father John Rodriguez to Kyoto to visit Ieyasu and, if possible, to prevail upon Terasawa to change his attitude. Ieyasu was ambitious and was even then plotting the conquest of the whole country and for this reason he was looking everywhere for friends and allies. He wished, therefore, to show favor to the Christians and priests and ordered Terasawa to do nothing more against the Nagasaki Christians.

Organtino was thus enabled to remain in Kyoto and to work quietly for the reconstruction of the mission. The trials and troubles of these years of persecution had sapped

his strength, however, and his superiors therefore recalled him to the college in Nagasaki where he spent the last three years of his life. He was bed-ridden much of the time but devoted himself to "prayer and meditation on the Passion of Christ." He died in Nagasaki on April 22, 1609 at the age of 76.

Resources

Laures, J. *Takayama Ukon*. Munster, 1954.

Matsuda, K. Kagayaku Miyako no shito (Biography of Father Organtino). Tokyo, 1947.

© Francis Britto & the Jesuits of Japan, 2005. All Rights Reserved. Solely for private use. Not to be edited or altered without permission. Not to be reproduced for any commercial purpose whatsoever. Free distribution is permitted. Contact < francisbritto[At] hotmail.com > for details.

Fr. Hubert Cieslik, S.J. was born in 1914 and died in 1988. One of the most respected historians of Japanese Christianity, he has written numerous books and articles on Japanese Church in German, English, and Japanese. He wrote the present article for an English journal—now defunct. Fr. Cieslik's printed articles were collected by Francis Mathy, S.J., Ph.D. The digital version was prepared, edited, and composed for PDF by Francis Britto, S.J., Ph.D.

Recommended Citation:

Cieslik, Hubert. 2005. 'Soldo Organtino: The Architect of the Japanese Mission.' Retrieved from Francis Britto's All About Francis Xavier < http://pweb.sophia.ac.jp/~d-mccoy/xavier >

Brittonia SJStamps Francis Xavier SJWeb OPAC-Library SUCC Top

¹The Latinate word *Visitator* was used in ecclesiastical circles to refer to an official visitor who is appointed by Church or Mission authorities to investigate one or more regions, with a specific mandate and special administrative powers.