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The Sacred Disguised: An Instance of the Double Use of Space by Japan's Hidden Christians

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*Christianity arrived on the island of Shikoku, Japan, from the neighboring island of Kyushu in the mid-sixteenth century, an event commemorated by a signboard and gravesite where some of the early converts to the faith were buried. The sanctified area exhibits what might be expected of Hidden Christian spatiality: a quasi-Buddhist nature, syncretistic Shinto elements, and offertory tools; each of which would be quite out of place in any other "Christian" context. What may the sacrality of this ground have entailed? What significance did its objects contain for those who created them and visited them? Moreover, how "ecumenical" could worship there have been if one half (the Christian) was for political reasons forcibly kept hidden while the other half (Buddhist/Shinto) was open? These are the questions we pursue, although our conclusions can perhaps do no more than indicate a direction.***

Keywords: *Hidden Christianity, iconography, object/artifact, phenomenology of religious experience, philosophy of religion, Shikoku, Japan, Shinto/Buddhist*

At the Entrance

Japan today is a famously irreligious society, and if thought were given to what form of belief or ritual acts might remain amongst her populace, the mind would likely come to rest on Buddhism or, possibly for the more well-informed, that in addition to the indigenous and largely folk system called Shinto (translated literally: "The Way (or Path) of the Gods"); but such a sketching belies the central place of these same Shinto concepts of the divine, and of the influence they extend to many details of a Japanese approach to life, including how her Hidden Christians would come to conduct their practices. The nation's history with Christianity is moreover a long one, far outstripping its more recent encounters with other major world faiths, and in that a further basis is provided for our study below on one of the more unique holy spaces in the archipelago: an outdoor communal burial ground designed and built by a grouping of this Christian sect like

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** Acknowledgements: I would like to thank the peer-reviewers, the editorial and review membership of the journal for their kind assistance and helpful insights on an earlier draft of this paper. The comments I received were stimulating, encouraging, and eminently helpful.

no other.[1] Our point of focus – this particular grave – will be introduced in full in Section 2, but prior to that, we will need to provide some grounding comments on its setting, conditions, and related conceptualities.

Towards this exploratory end, we will also need to reflect on what the enclosure itself teaches us about the peculiar and odd sort of "Christianity" which somehow clung against tremendous odds to its tenets, tucked away out of sight, for more than two centuries. To enable our thinking on the memorial and the items found within it, then, we will first briefly introduce the movement of Japan's Hidden Christians: how such began, the pressures that forced it to take the form it did, and the elements which thereby forged something that would almost certainly be unrecognizable to the European missionaries who struggled and suffered to see the religion planted in Japan in the first place. We will undertake this endeavor "backwards," as it were, shifting from the newer Christian to the older Shinto with an eye on the surrounding Buddhist. Our first main section will therefore provide an overview intended to contextualize and situate a proper historical framing, and thereafter in the second section we will make our attempt to "step inside" the chosen grounds, using an analysis primarily phenomenological but also historical-critical in methodology, pondering what the devices found therein could have meant (or yet mean) in light of the comprehensions and priorities the adherents likely held: the lifeworlds[2] of the believers. Although we simply do not have enough information on how the Hidden Christians of the era we are contemplating might have thought with respect to their dead in memory and reverence, we will make use of the research to hand, and as a supplement to such I believe the procedural approach to be applied here can offer a fresh means of treating this fascinating and specific subculture of Japan's living history; one that rings, moreover, with lessons for today.[3]

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[1] Photographs and analyses of the site will be offered in the below; on other graves and sacred burials constructed by Hidden Christian communities, see also: Tinka Delakorda Kawashima, "Landscape in Hirado revealing the secrets of Hidden Christians' life-world: National and global policies in cultural heritage protection," *Anthropological Notebooks* 23, no. 3 (2017): 87-107; and Stephen Turnbull, *The Kakure Kirishitan of Japan: A Study of Their Development, Beliefs and Rituals to the Present Day* (Oxfordshire, UK: Routledge, 1998). We shall have occasion to revisit both these scholars' work in more detail in our following considerations.

[2] The term is Edmund Husserl's (*Lebenswelt*) and is indicative of the full spectrum of embedded concerns for a living individual; for two good starters on the thinker's many works, see: Edmund Husserl, *The Essential Husserl: Basic Writings in Transcendental Phenomenology*, intro. and ed. Donn Welton (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999); and David Woodruff Smith, *Husserl*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon-on-Thames, UK: Routledge, 2013).

[3] I am very grateful and honored, to have had it pointed out to me by an anonymous peer reviewer that my work with the Hidden Christians (here, but presumably also my previous

1. Background: The Hidden Christians – Space, Icons, Worship

Christianity was first brought to Japan by Francis Xavier, one of the co-founders of The Society of Jesus (whose members are better known by the title "Jesuit") in 1549 CE, with Xavier's initial landing taking place in Kagoshima Prefecture on the southern edge of Japan's southernmost large island of Kyushu. The date was August 15th, which happened to be the Feast Day of the Assumption,[4] something the missionary surely took for an auspicious sign; that intuition of blessing, if it occurred, would indeed have been deemed right by him, for the new faith was warmly welcomed by many average Japanese and enjoyed a rapid expansion over the following few decades, particularly in the regions of Kyushu where it began and in and around the imperial center of Kyoto on Japan's primary island of Honshu. Growth was such as to attain converts numerous enough to cause the military government great concern about spreading foreign influences via the influx of Western ideas and practices which accompanied the priests and their teachings. The thoughts being spread were unapproved notions, threatening to the required obedience and allegiance expected for the "rightful" authorities, and thus judged a danger to public order. Political decisions were therefore made and reinforced which favored and promoted social control through the "harmonious" elimination of minority groups: hence in 1587 the nationally unifying *daimyo* lord (a high rank of landholding samurai[5]) Toyotomi Hideyoshi issued an edict banning Christianity and starting a lengthy and uneven series of persecutions and suppressions upon their winding path.[6]

In this situation the Jesuits soon found themselves pushed to the margins of their host society, and they accordingly relocated their seminary for

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research of which the present is an extension) may offer the first time(s) that phenomenological analyses have been applied to try and understand the lifeworlds of these groups of people.

[4] Turnbull, *The Kakure Kirishitan*. The Feast Day of the Assumption refers to Mary, the mother of Jesus, who is believed to have been bodily taken to heaven at the end of her life and thus avoided a physical death; this idea-event is still celebrated on this date in many countries today.

[5] For a summary see: Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Daimyo: Japanese social class," *Britannica,* https://www.britannica.com/topic/daimyo, accessed February 22, 2021. At this point historically Japan was nearing the end of a long period of civil war in which feudal chieftains had competed with one another for territory and power. Full national unification would arrive with the beginning of the seventeenth century under Tokugawa Ieyasu, introduced below.

[6] On this and the following see the study primarily focused on Hidden Christian usage of Kannon (the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy) statuary as Virgin Mary iconic substitutes: Andrew Oberg, "Facing a Form of/Formed God: Japan's Hidden Christians and Usages of the Image – A Phenomenological Perspective," *Cultural Studies* 8 (2020): 31-72.

the training of indigenous priests from the city of Kyoto to the remote island of Ikitsuki in Nagasaki Prefecture, an outlet in the seas between Japan and the Korean peninsula. Even that drastic step was not tenable over time, however, since the first shogun of a fully united and completely centralized Japan – Tokugawa Ieyasu – signed another edict in 1614 that forcibly expelled every foreign priest and shuttered each church: effective immediately, everywhere, and strengthened shortly thereafter by the then-ruling second Tokugawa shogun Hidetada in 1616,[7] whose tenure from 1605-1623 overlapped with his father's (Ieyasu) in practical terms despite the latter's technical abdication of office in 1605.[8] The stage was hence set for an extended term of governmental repression (including torture to effect apostasies and public and private executions of practitioners) that lasted through the remainder of the Edo Period (1603-1867/68) and until the early years of the Meiji Era (when the emperor ceased being a figurehead as he had been under the shoguns and was restored to actual power; the Meiji emperor's reign spanned the years 1868-1912 and was marked by Japan's rapid industrialization and the initial steps of its colonial expansion onto mainland Asia as well as Taiwan, Penghu, and other Pacific islands).

During these centuries Japanese believers of Christianity were forced both to go underground and to fend for themselves, with recourse to neither spiritual assistance nor even guidance from European sources, and with few material aids and objects of daily praxis upon which much of ritual rests.[9] Yet where there is a will – as the saying goes – there is often (but, I would interject, not *always*) a way, and thus the faithful created for themselves rosaries of knotted string, folded paper crosses (both easily disposed of – even swallowable – should any authorities arrive to investigate and search for evidence of the forbidden religion) and painted scrolls bearing the images of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and the Saints which could be rolled up and concealed within a home's interior supporting beams.[10] We might at first applaud such ingenui-

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[7] Turnbull, *The Kakure Kirishitan*; Oberg, "Facing a Form of".

[8] That is, Hidetada was formally head of the bureaucracy from 1605, although his father retained much influence and power until his death in 1616.

[9] The original missionaries had brought and distributed some medallions, crosses, et cetera.

[10] Samples and recreations of these items can be viewed in Nagasaki City's "Twenty-Six Martyrs Museum" and the "Christian Museum" attached to the Oura Cathedral. The former is located on a hill across from the modern Japan Railways main Nagasaki Station, a mount which served as the site of the crucifixion of twenty-six Christian believers – including two young children – who were forcibly marched there from Kyoto after having had their ears and/or noses cut off. The group was a mix of foreign missionaries and Japanese believers, and their public execution was intended as a warning and an encouragement not to accept the alien faith, and that if one had already accepted it to instead quickly renounce it. The cru-

ty, but then find ourselves giving pause in bafflement at what seems needlessly reckless behavior by these converts: no matter how clever, why make anything at all? Still, if we consider that while it may be the case that one can always be a Christian (or any manner of believer in any religious tradition) in one's heart, the day-to-day of belief was understood then to require – or at least encourage – particular outward vestiges and utilizations, and for Catholics of the day, and indeed for many still, such entailed specific items, even – perhaps especially – if the usual places of the formerly operating but now closed church buildings ceased to be available. One may be enjoined to worship in secret within one's home, with or without a small number of coreligionists, but one would likely still desire to do such as much in line with how one had been taught as possible. This, for them, was a matter of salvation.

This query of commodities and locales naturally raises the pertinent issue of icon possession and usage amongst the community of Christian believers who persisted in their practices following the outlawing of the faith and the subsequent double bind that the suddenly *Hidden* Christians (compelled into subterfuge, disguise, the covering over of what they were doing) found themselves in, and the pressures must have been enormous. To begin with, on one hand, was the Jesuits' catechism for Japanese converts[11] – called the *Doctrina Christiana* and a founding teaching for Christianity throughout Japan, one whose influence lasted at least until the end of the underground period when new missionaries and updated teachings were once more allowed into the nation – which encouraged multiple sacred images to be placed on family altars; on the other hand was the simple reality of these very items being far too easily discoverable by neighbors (prying eyes and hands which may then have filed a report with the local authorities) or by investigatory officials conducting either a warranted or an unwarranted search of a home during the prohibitory period. Of course, at the time of the docu-

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cifixions took place on February 5th, 1597 – relatively early on in the period of persecution – and at the time the location provided an unobstructed view visible from Nagasaki harbor: both domestic and foreign arriving ships would not have missed the scene. The latter museum is a part of the Oura Cathedral's grounds, a space noteworthy itself in that it was the first church to be rebuilt following the relaxation, and then lifting, of the ban on foreign religions [along with a widening of what was considered acceptable public expression (a seedling of "free speech")] after the end of the shogunate government and the restoration of imperial rule. I visited both museums on August 27th, 2019.

[11] For those unfamiliar with the term "catechism", it is a book or other document that contains a summary of official (authorized) teachings and rites (traditionally in a question-and-answer format); in this context, those of the Catholic Church and with regards to those beliefs and rituals perhaps popularly known as the "sacraments" but strictly including more than the core seven sacraments of the Church; see: Michael Walsh, *Roman Catholicism: The Basics*, 2nd ed. (Oxfordshire, UK: Routledge, 2016).

ment's dispensation, the religion was legally still tolerated and thus direct blame for this endangerment cannot be placed on the catechism's authors,[12] but the dual stresses which resulted nevertheless remained.

Moreover, in another guidance text issued to believers regarding the persecution of Christians (titled *Readiness for Martyrdom*), the missionary writers stressed that neither acts purporting to be non-Christian but actually Christian (e.g. carrying and using a Buddhist rosary instead of a Christian one for the associated Christian prayers) nor false apostasies (e.g. verbally declaring oneself non-Christian while mentally maintaining one's belief) were ever permitted, although it was considered acceptable to not confess if not asked and to hide whatever Christian items one possessed[13] (very interestingly from a speculative point of view, we might add, as this booklet too was produced prior to the commencement of official prohibition; might the missionaries have had an intimation of things to come?). Thus the combination of being encouraged to make use of physical objects in one's religious life and practice, together with the discouragement (and indeed the active instruction against) applying non-Christian items for Christian rituals may help to account for the irregular forms of iconography that we find in Edo Period Christianity, although I think there is more to it than just that, as will be discussed below. We should note as well that in the end, Japan's Hidden Christians did exactly what they were told not to do: i.e. use non-Christian items as Christian foci for worship, and this in locations which were simultaneously sacred and profane, such as the "doubled" gravesite to be considered.

Taken together, based on this evidence it does appear likely that the initial Jesuit extolment to build up a Christian family altar played a large role in the spatial and item-oriented practices of the Hidden Christians, and then that the necessity of disguise led almost inexorably to the final positioning of Buddhist statues and pictures as chicane Christian reverential aids upon the private and public quasi-reliquaries that were used (due to these objects' extant social ubiquitousness and thus status as above suspicion; Shinto does not employ statuary or independent iconography in home usage, rather

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[12] For some related issues connected with a sort of "Bible" (a collection of mish-mashed orally received Bible stories, other stories, and local legends) that the Hidden Christians held but seem not to have circulated much, see: Christal Whelan (intro., trans. and annotator), *The Beginning of Heaven and Earth: The Sacred Book of Japan's Hidden Christians* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996).

[13] Turnbull, *The Kakure Kirishitan;* this text probably dates to the early year of 1557 – a mere eight years after Francis Xavier's first arrival – and thus, like the *Doctrina*, pre-dated the official ban on Christianity. Although later Christians who lived under that ban were likely not familiar with this document itself, its tenets had clearly been taught to them and were apparently both accepted and applied.

miniature Shinto shrine buildings are typically placed on raised shelves near a dwelling or business place's ceiling). In these spaces and with these articles it becomes easy to imagine how the practicalities involved in such a situation could have led believers to the conclusive decisions that they did. If instruction to employ statues and images and the like ritually has been received and acceded to by a community, but then the same has also been restricted from possessing certain items while allowed to have others, it seems a short step to using the acceptable icons to secretly practice the forbidden faith which has become such a significant part of their lives.

Yet here the question remarked upon above remains: Why make use of a physical object at all? Does not the first of the Ten Commandments – that foundational ethical code for both Judaism and Christianity – anyway condemn making a "likeness" of God/"God"? (Tangentially – but importantly – we may ask at what point does something become "like" enough to qualify as a "likeness"?) Furthermore, if one were to nevertheless engage an image (of whatever kind, and even of what appears to be a safe legal option: e.g. a statue of the Bodhisattva Goddess of Mercy Kannon mentally perceived as a substitute for the Blessed Virgin Mary), such a person would still run the risk of having its true purpose be ascertained by someone at some point: again, quite reasonably such exposure could have been via an inquisitive passerby or unannounced visit from a samurai guard.

By definition the sacred is that which is set apart: be it a modest household dais, a concealed nook, a natural forest clearing, evocative cave, or a grand church, temple, or other building – even a specifically designed gravesite – and which has been bequeathed with special purposes and meanings; yet with the Hidden Christians we find people who were compelled by the circumstances of their lives to in some ways *set apart the set apart,* to take one "sacred" and try to push it in the direction of another "sacred". Such would be a difficult undertaking for any faithful of any time, but we might suppose all the more so for a presumably mostly illiterate and uneducated convert (statistically the odds of these labels as applicable are high within the socio-cultural framework) of feudal and rural Japan at this particular historical juncture. The creeping syncretism we will find time and again marking Hidden Christian practices – bearers of and witnesses to an overlap with indigenous Japanese spiritual customs – should therefore not surprise us overmuch; these are points worth dwelling on for the illuminating aspects they might offer in a study of space and confession. A few words, then, on these homegrown and unique rites of Japan's Shinto beliefs and numinous approaches, abstractions which for centuries remained uncodified but served as a backdrop to both Buddhist ideas (which arrived in Japan from mainland

Asia in the sixth century CE[14]) and Christian. Through these remarks, I hope to round out the necessary grounding for the exploration to follow one exemplary Hidden Christian sacral environ.

The ancient and therefore thoroughly culturally ingrained folk religious perspectives which became grouped under the heading of Shinto have amongst their core rituals practices related to the concept of *goshintai* (or *gozensama* in a telling terminological structural twist by the Hidden Christians, one which yet kept the same *goshintai* word associations), a marker of Shinto's pantheism and indicating that an object becomes literally – and in the full sense of that adjective: definitionally when translated – "the body of *Kami* [God]";[15] furthermore "Like a body it [i.e. the *goshintai* object] contains the spirit of *Kami* when it [i.e. the *Kami*] comes down to manifest its presence in this world."[16] (I should note that technically the latter Hidden Christian phrasing of *gozensama* could be given as "the honorable one/One before" and thus some might see in it an interpretation different from *goshintai,* but the subtext of *gozensama* is to being physically in front of the "honorable one/One" and was employed by Hidden Christians to refer to the items on their altars,[17] therefore it is more properly judged as indicative of an understanding that comprehends a spiritual inhabitation (now) present in the object which the devotee is "before": as with *goshintai* we find here a divine "manifesting".) In this a sort of physical-metaphysical bridge is fashioned, a transcendent interaction that is viable but not instantiated; in the mind of the supplicant, one's prayers do not go vertically "up to heaven" but instead horizontally to the *Kami* who is in/has become the *goshintai.*

However much it might have been taught to a worshiper at a Shinto shrine that an indwelling of this sort was only temporary, or to a Christian

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[14] For an overview, see: Mark Cartwright, "Buddhism in Ancient Japan," *World History Encyclopedia,* June 19, 2017, https://www.ancient.eu/article/1080/buddhism-in-ancient-japan/#:~:text=Buddhism%20was%20introduced%20into%20Japan,in%20Japan%20at%20that%20time, accessed February 26, 2021.

[15] There is no direct (nor fully notionally parallel) English equivalent for the Japanese *Kami,* which is used without translation by the author being quoted here, but related words such as "God", "sacred", "divine", "ineffable", "spirit", "numinous", "mystery", and "Other" are all inclusive of the underlying nuances involved. As with much in the Japanese language, the idea and its expression are vague but extremely pervasive. The written Japanese for these three terms, which readers of (originally) Chinese characters will find enlightening (modern Chinese, Japanese, and Taiwanese renderings each being similar enough to give a mutual feel to those knowledgeable in one and/or another) are as follows: *goshintai:* 御神体; *gozensama:* 御前様; *Kami:* 神. Shinto, by the way, is thus: 神道.

[16] Motohisa Yamakage, *The Essence of Shinto: Japan's Spiritual Heart* (New York: Kodansha USA, 2006), 66.

[17] Turnbull, *The Kakure Kirishitan*; Oberg, "Facing a Form of".

convert that where and what one prays to is just a symbol (an aid for religious praxis),[18] in actual practice it proved (and proves still) simple enough for these pieces of "mere matter" to be thought to have acquired religious potency in and of themselves, resulting in an attitudinal comportment towards the location, statue, icon, et cetera, wherein the boundary is blurred between praying to God/"God" (or a God/"God") through an assisting item, and praying *to the item* itself.[19] Such abstractional "slippage" (if we might label it thus) makes much intuitive sense, for there is a manner in which the material (of any form) that may only "on occasion" become holy seems nevertheless special to a follower at every moment: its "beyondness" appears to carry over into the most mundane hours so that should one's eyes or another sense happen to alight upon it (e.g. a Hindu statue used in prayer, the sounds of the muezzin, a Star of David necklace, a decorative painting of the crucifixion) a certain affective response will be evoked, even while being busily engaged in an activity that ostensibly has nothing to do with a living faith.

Moreover, the default and itself cognitively hidden crossover of ancient indigenous Shinto beliefs with fresh Christian comprehensions that we find represented by the Hidden Christian usage of altars and icons (as will be further illustrated below) – with a dose as well of Buddhism by virtue of the outwardly Buddhist and inwardly "Christian" shapes of many of the substances employed: a Buddhist statue prayed to while thinking of Christian saints and taking those prayers in the Shinto format of supplication "to the (inhabited) item" – can readily be understood as virtuously intended (from a Hidden Christian point of view) but erroneously enacted (from a non-Hidden Christian point of view) once we return our thought to the aforementioned stresses bearing down on this group who desired to maintain their adopted religion but found themselves in a setting where the conservation of the same had been proscribed and punishable by pain and death. In Hidden Christian lives there was neither the freedom nor the leisure for theological niceties – one had to find a way to get by, never mind how/whether those behaviors influenced one's related thinking (if, that is – and surely a very

[18] That is, in the days prior to the advent of Hidden Christianity, whereafter new converts would have been instructed following the *goshintai* conceptuality vis-à-vis the hidden and/or disguised home altars thence used for worship; I am imagining in the above text an earlier convert to the faith won over by a European or Japanese missionary's persuasions when the official Church materials were still to be had and freely referenced as instructional guides.

[19] Turnbull, *The Kakure Kirishitan*, 106, highlights how this is the case amongst the surviving Hidden Christian communities who endeavor to keep the traditions of their ancestors in the religious objects they practice with, actually praying *to* the *gozensama* objects and considering *those objects* to answer their prayers, rather than making an appeal "to God as symbolized by the *gozensama*".

large "if" at that – such conceptual stretchings were ever noticed, before or after acts of ritual).

To summarize – and admittedly somewhat repetitiously – we might thusly reasonably conclude that upon entering a sacred space and praying *towards* a Buddhist or Shinto item with Christian ideas in mind a Hidden Christian, by virtue of the culturally embedded and theoretically unexamined abstractional (Shinto) conditioning, nevertheless ended up praying *to* said item in the very non-Christian *goshintai/gozensama* sense of a *Kami*-indwelt quasi-"incarnation". This is an important detail, and the prepositions here are everything: *towards* is directed at the idea or concept or signifier as represented or symbolized by the object, whereas *to* is directed at the object *itself.* We should bear in mind as well that even for those individuals who were raised in Hidden Christian homes following an earlier generation's change of allegiance but who still grew up in the religio-cultural environment of Shinto conceptualities quite by the accident of being Japanese, the entirety of the above would yet apply, whether actively taught to them or not.[20] This (almost certainly) unanalyzed mental perspective carried by the Hidden Christians will need to be borne along by us too (although *with* awareness!) when we visit one of their sacred spaces in the proceeding section.

Finally, there is the additional facet of Shinto theology that explains how materials like the mirrors which are often placed within shrines and in front of home *kamidana* altars (described above)[21] become receptive to the descending spirit of *Kami,* that its (i.e. the *Kami's*) "spiritual vibration permeates the surrounding area"[22] and that the mirror or other "divine summoner" (or temporary "divine home"), such as a holy tree, can act as an "antennae" for the spirit of *Kami* to come into, and that so possessed the mirror (tree, et cetera) thereafter acts as a pathway for prayers to be heard.[23] Once more the conceptually crucial dividing line between "to God/'God' through an item" and "to an item" is being notionally erased as the *aid* becomes a *thoroughfare* becomes *a dwelling place* becomes *a manifestation.* The "just things" where one performs rites are suddenly Über *Dinge.* This too would have been lurk-

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[20] In my experience of living in Japan for many years now and in speaking with Japanese people about the topic, Shinto priests perform very little instruction in their duties related to the public. This is presumably both a result of the non- (in some ways anti-) orthodox approach of the religion and its absolute pervasiveness. It *is* Japanese culture and therefore (in many or most Japanese eyes) needs no annotation. Many Western commentators would label Shinto shamanistic, although I think it has a more deeply theorized set of theological principles than that term typically implies.

[21] The characters for this term are: 神棚; literally "God shelf".

[22] Yamakage, *The Essence of Shinto*, 78.

[23] *Ibidem*, 80.

ing in the subterranean confines of any Hidden Christian's worldview having been born into the socio-cultural milieu that they were. The religious object is itself inhabited, the area is permeated, the sublime is manifested: these understandings of the numinous and divine-human relations would have been second nature, elements taken for granted, deep – and again the almost unacknowledged aspect here is crucial – in the minds of the believers; when Hidden Christians built their sacred areas and endowed them with particular materials these varying elements would have combined and found the most seemingly natural expression.

With that foundation now laid, let us move to our examination of one such blessed place, somewhat unusual in its being outdoors and public (no tucked away home altar), but more so archetypal in its layout, containments, and design. What might we learn from a probing of this locale, what might we discover in an exploration of the possible felt worship experiences of the Hidden Christians who visited it? Although it is of course impossible for us – from this vantage – to "know," we might still find an application, and in that perhaps too learn what a sharing might mean: across history as well as across belief.

2. Marking Christianity's Arrival on Shikoku: A Commemorative Signboard, a Consecrated Gravesite – Some Phenomenological Speculations on the Space

Our gravesite, our sacred spot, and its doubled, shared, or "stacked" purposes is to be found on a corner of Shikoku, the smallest of Japan's four major islands (in terms of total area, similar in size to Northern Ireland[24]), and much better known for the pilgrimage route through its eighty-eight encircling Buddhist temples[25] than for anything related to the nation's history of Hidden Christianity. For that, visitors and residents alike look to the neighboring island of Kyushu – much larger and much more economically, politically, and historically important – with its famous prefecture of Nagasaki and the many sites and structures there that have come to stand for the life of the

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[24] A Google search lists Shikoku at 18,100 km^2 and Northern Ireland at 14,130 km^2. https://www.google.com/search?q=shikoku+japan+and+northern+ireland+total+area&rlz=1C1RUCY_enJP747JP747&oq=shikoku+japan+and+northern+ireland+total+area&aqs=chrome..69i57j33i160.8289j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8, accessed March 02, 2021.

[25] For some general information, see "Shikoku Henro," *Tourism Shikoku*, https://shikoku-tourism.com/en/shikoku-henro/shikoku-henro, accessed March 09, 2021. Ian Reader has also written a well-known book on the route and accompanying reflections and studies; see his *Making Pilgrimage: Meaning and Practice in Shikoku* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005).

faith during its early years in the country.[26] Yet to overlook Shikoku would be to miss examples of valuable microcosms that represent the transplanting of ideas and conceptual-perceptional lifeworlds, notionally-oriented complexes that – perhaps all the better for their diminutive physical sizes when compared with the edifices on Kyushu – illustrate the symbolism through which Hidden Christians comprehended and interacted with the society and land around them. Since these ideational and identitarian allegiances had to be kept secret and done so with even less support than their coreligionists in Nagasaki had,[27] areas such as our gravesite were crafted on levels structurally so simplistic as to be deceptive: a "hiding" in plain sight, looking almost like anything else, but with tiny markers of other cogitations at play.

We naturally can only guess as to what it felt like to be a convert living under the circumstances which the Hidden Christians faced or, indeed, what might have compelled those first faithful to abandon the familial and national heritages they had received and undergo baptism at the hands of foreigners who were so entirely other in every respect; overcoming obstacles such as these points to genuine metanoia, and thus on this facet of "why" we perhaps need only accept the transpositions as sincere and move our wonder on. What we may be better equipped to study and hope to advance, however, are in regard to the relics that have been left behind and what we know of the practices involved; meditations here may prove epistemologically salient, and possibly even more widely relevant. How might an area that necessitated a subterfuge of intent have been used? What may be learnt of the potential mental postures of the believers from the items that were employed there for religious adoration? Could worship conducted outwardly in a "safe" manner (Shinto, Buddhist) yet simultaneously done with an inner locus on the "dangerous" (Hidden Christian) really be considered *ecumenical?* The dictionary would seem to disagree, for there is no real intergroup cooperation to take

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[26] Which, perhaps unsurprisingly, has become a vibrant niche tourist industry complete with guidebooks on which cafés to drop in at and what sweets to enjoy after visiting nearby church remains, a priest's concealed home, monument, or site of imprisonment and martyrdom. One such publication that I picked up quite by chance is called, 長崎の世界遺産めぐり:「オトナ周楽旅行」ハンドブック (*Rounding Nagasaki's World Heritage Sites: A Handbook for an Adult "School Excursion"*) (Nagasaki City, Nagasaki: Nagasaki Prefecture Tourist Federation, 2019). There is a pun in the titular characters chosen as well: 周楽 mean "rounds" or "perimeter" and "easy", "relaxed", "enjoyable" but can be read the same way as 修学, which are the actual characters used for a school excursion (with the "travel" part being the 旅行 characters for both compounds) and mean "training", "cultivation", "discipline", "learning".

[27] This purely from a lack of numbers; Xavier may have first landed with his proselytizing message in Kagoshima, but it was Nagasaki that would become Christianity's primary center in the country, due in part surely to its legacy as an open port and international trade city.

note of, and certainly not any between differing Christian branches. We do know that even after conversion many Hidden Christians followed (or attempted to follow) standard Buddhist methods of offering donations as a form of payment to the priest or church for the performance of the burial ritual (prior to the underground period of course, when Church-sanctioned priests were still present in the country), and that they often requested a mass be performed for the deceased as a Buddhist may ask for the *nenbutsu* prayer to be chanted.[28] Such, though, do not reach to the collaborative aspect we seek, rather only to a blurring or a re-/differing application. Yet there is nevertheless the wider sense in which we might take "ecumenical" and for that the type of misshapen and default unity that appears to be occurring when people conceive and approach the divine in the same (or similar) ways might be enough. Does it matter if a single space is used for varying religious formats, or if one (the mainstream) has no inkling of the other (the "hidden")? If a Hidden Christian makes herself appear Buddhist and/or Shinto in the expression of her spirituality, and if a genuine Buddhist and/or Shinto person is present at the same location and time, and engages in nearly the same acts with the same items, then what claims might be made for the sacredness of the grounds itself (and would such *hold*)? If agreement of sacrality is all that is needed for a christening of holiness to apply, then such a place must be so; but is that sufficient?

Let us, therefore, marvel at this (forcibly) strange Hidden Christian religiousness, this urge to express a faith so alien and disconnected from one's birth conditions, and one that was circumscribed as forbidden, as punishable by death. It is fitting, then, that our chosen space is a burial ground, for the risk of execution was ever-present to these believers; furthermore, in a nation where ancestor veneration is still the norm (as it is throughout much of Asia) visits to a communal grave would not only have been an excellent way to avoid raising suspicions but would also have fit in with the Hidden Christians' own ideas regarding the dead[29] (a facet to which we will return).

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[28] Ikuo Higashibaba, *Christianity in Early Modern Japan: Kirishitan Belief and Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 2001). Higashibaba also notes that as Japan's agrarian-based economy developed in the late fifteenth century in conjunction with the shift from a manor system to one of territory controlled by a military lord (a *daimyo* or other within the ranked shogunate system) social religious activities moved from being centered around kinship groups to regional ones, and that "religious practices constituted a crucial aspect of communal life" (p. 155). Such thoughts highlight the difficult position Christians faced when forced into a context of hiding, and also remind one of the significance of whole villages converting such as those discussed by Turnbull in *The Kakure Kirishitan.*

[29] Turnbull, *The Kakure Kirishitan*; and Delakorda Kawashima, "Landscape in Hirado"; both note how relatives – following Shinto beliefs – were thought by the Hidden Christians to have required worship.

We shall take this Shikoku Christian edifice to those of blessed memory as a first step in considering the forms of the sanctified area and the icon usage entailed therein; for as explained above Japan's Hidden Christians used rites that were especially directed towards statuary. We will try and imagine – phenomenologically, analytically – what might have been in hearts and heads based on what we can discern from probable influences to approach and world-comprehending (in a Heideggerean sense[30]) that extended from the background conceptualities involved and were thence further generated through the physical objects engaged. Perfect conclusions will remain beyond us, but we may be able to ascertain from the notional, and from the place of the religious image, lessons that can then be applied and perhaps extended. We will enter the space and see what happens.

Geographically the burial grounds can be found in the northern part of what today is Matsuyama City, in the section called Horie (formerly a beachfront), which is located on the northwest of Shikoku and a short distance by boat from eastern Kyushu, directly across from that island's prefecture of Oita. In commemoration of this first location for Shikoku's Hidden Christian community, and as a historical marker and monument, there is a signboard posted which reads in translation as follows:

> In 1559 (at the end of the Muromachi Period) Father Gaspar Vilela came to Horie Beach accompanied by some monks. This is said to be the first landing of a Christian missionary on Shikoku. Five years later, when Father Luis Frois and company stayed in Horie, six local residents received baptism and Christianity was first born on Shikoku. After that, the suppression of Christianity increased in severity, and cruel punishments were suffered by missionaries and believers. Yet the earnest believers continued their faith in secret and came to be called the "Hidden Christians." This grave was discovered in 1975. The stone monument is well readied with the alignment of a crucifix stone in the center, a church stone on the right side, and a five-wheeled tower on the left side.
>
> Matsuyama City Horie Public Hall[31]

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[30] On Martin Heidegger's concept of "world" and the self as "thrown" into it [greatly expanding out (and to me very powerfully) from Husserl's notion of "horizon"], see his sections 13, 18-21, 38, and 43 in Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, rev. and for. Dennis J. Schmidt (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010). For a brief and distilled glossing, see also: Richard Sembera, *Rephrasing Heidegger: A Companion to* Being and Time (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2007), 107-8, where "falling" (in place of the more commonly found translation of "thrown") in the "inauthentic mode" is explained.

[31] Image retrieved from: 「隠れキリシタン碑～松山市堀江町松尾」、とんぼ草。 ("Hidden Christian Monument – Matsuyama City, Horie Village Matsuo," *Tombosou: livedoor Blog*),

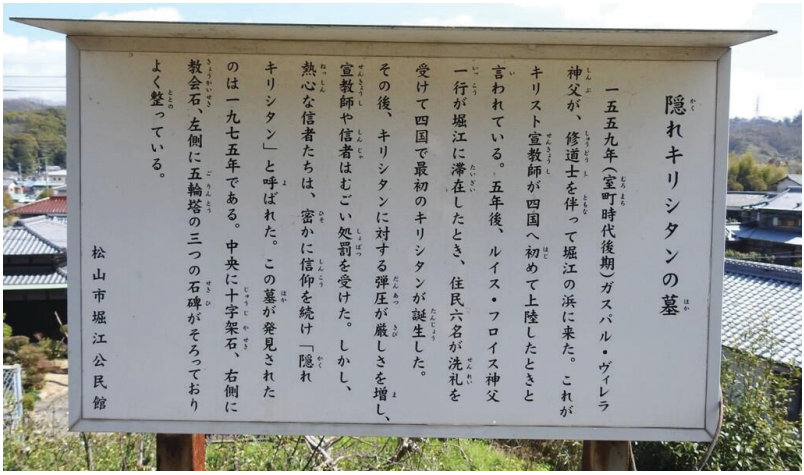


Figure 1: The signboard at the Hidden Christian gravesite in Matsuyama City, Ehime Prefecture

While the recounting of missionary and Church-related activities here is quite cursive, the grave itself provides many fascinating details for analysis, as its description hints at but which will be better grasped through a visual presentation and commentary. Before proceeding further, then, we will need to share these in full with the reader, asking that the images be returned to in sight and thought during the subsequent discussion. Firstly a photo of the full site:



Figure 2: The Hidden Christian gravesite at Horie, Matsuyama City, Ehime Prefecture[32]

March 14, 2020, http://blog.livedoor.jp/tombosou/archives/52133781.html, accessed August 25, 2020. Website and signboard in Japanese only; English translation by the author.

[32] Image retrieved from *Ibidem,* accessed August 24, 2020.

Next, a closer view of the so-called "crucifix stone":



Figure 3: The "crucifix stone" of the Hidden Christian gravesite at Horie, Matsuyama City, Ehime Prefecture[33]

Finally, a diagonal of both the "crucifix stone" and the "church stone":



Figure 4: The "crucifix stone" (right) and the "church stone" (left) of the Hidden Christian gravesite at Horie, Matsuyama City, Ehime Prefecture[34]

[33] Image retrieved from *Ibidem,* accessed August 24, 2020.

[34] Image retrieved from *Ibidem,* accessed August 24, 2020.

To begin, we might take note of the elements that seemingly do not belong in what is purportedly a Christian gravesite. Figure 2 above shows both the described "five-wheeled tower" (see the signboard) and next to it (on the tower's right side, facing) what appears to be a small hut on a platform, which like the other objects displayed also has an offertory stone in front of it with a saké cup placed thereupon. This latter unnamed element (that is, ignored by the signboard) is a very common sight in Japan, visible from locales as diverse as the corners of rice fields to wooded mountain hillsides to – usually in more ornate form – the *kamidana* altar shelves placed near ceilings in office spaces, other work areas, and (these days restricted to the more traditionally-oriented) personal homes. As remarked above, these forms are connected with Shinto, and they function as the symbolic and (notionally) literal temporary abodes for deities. To expound somewhat further on the theological background to these "houses", in Shinto thought there is a pervasive, pantheistic view of the divine, arranged in complex relations of spirit-based orders connected in a hierarchy whose lower end is composed of specific "numinous" natural features (e.g. waterfalls, rock formations, certain trees, rivers), then anthropomorphic mythological figures, and ultimately the more abstracted posit of a single and whole source (not unlike the Neoplatonic "One"[35]) from which the myriad gods, goddesses, essences, energies, ghosts, otherworldly beings, et cetera, spring. Each of these layers, moreover, warrants the moniker of *Kami,* as outlined in the preceding. However, it will be understood that such divine dwelling places – although perhaps most often formed in the shape visible here – need not necessarily be so arranged, nor even strictly be "built": for instance, a striking boulder centered in a forest's natural clearing might be considered functionally identical; what is pertinent is the idea that they do/can provide dwellings for spirits/Spirit. The item in Figure 2 is a visible example of the *goshintai* we have encountered. Since it is a home for the holy, we might think, it perforce has an offering placed before it, and perhaps we are not surprised that it has the same offering as those by the other parts of the gravesite. Yet we must recall that this is purportedly a *Christian* grave, and hence both the tiny construction and its stone and cup are completely out of place. Shall we then take the exhibited practice as an act of ecumenism, or syncretism, or both?

Initially, we might think its presence is meant simply as a disguising element, an emphasis of the necessary "hiddenness" that marked the expres-

[35] Yamakage, *The Essence of Shinto*; on the "One" see the wonderful treatment by Plotinus in Pierre Hadot, *Plotinus, or The Simplicity of Vision*, intro. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Michael Chase (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); and Dominic J. O'Meara, *Plotinus: An Introduction to the* Enneads (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

sion of Christian practice in Japan at this time. Alternatively, it could have been placed within the site as a gesture to those family members who may have wished to visit and honor their deceased forebears but who might not themselves have been Hidden Christians in belief and/or ideological personal identity. Yet again it is possible that it represents a certain "hedging of bets", as it were; since the transcendental is ultimately unknown it could have been deemed eminently practical to include components like this. Working from within the *goshintai* (albeit called by the Hidden Christians with the conceptually equal yet terminologically varied appellation *gozensama*) mindset though, one suspects – there is a strong hint of – a merging of belief and praxis being demonstrated here. Interestingly as well, the first missionaries to Japan did not seem to have spoken against ancestor worship (rather they attempted to direct the impulse into praying for those in Purgatory or other similar Church teachings[36]), and so the placement and arrangement of this object may also be a natural outgrowth of an essentially unchanged ritual even post-conversion (perhaps with slightly different thinking on the nature of the prayers given; but perhaps not).

Our query (ecumenism, syncretism, or both?) holds though, for this is clearly non-standardly Christian in form, and one does not today (nor would one have done then if not a Japanese person) pray for the deceased to be admitted into heaven in any association with a *Kami* "house." Tinka Delakorda Kawashima notes how for the Hidden Christians sacral locations are burial sites (she specifies "a martyr's grave," but we have already indicated how other spaces (large or small) might also have been sacred, and we wonder too if only a *martyr's* grave might qualify and not one for a believer who passed on naturally or via violence disconnected from martyrdom), and became memorialized by preserving the area with such shrine elements, and further that these might be shared with other community members.[37] If that were the case here, if the Shinto addition was meant as a device for non-Hidden Christians to also partake in a religious act in the same location (as above: other family members, et cetera), then we might deem this a (charitable) gesture of ecumenism. Alternatively, it could well have simply been a much later addition to an already established site, something set down (by some other group? yet who would intrude on another's grave?) on the side of what was previously there. Let us speculate that this last was not what happened, however, as I think a violation of this sort would be unlikely, and it is anyway more interesting (and more in line with our phenomenological

[36] Delakorda Kawashima, "Landscape in Hirado".

[37] *Ibidem,* 94.

analysis of the lifeworlds of these people who were circumstantially forced into forms of 'dual(split)-experience' nearly all of the time) to imagine it as there from the outset, and indeed if it were such would fit in with what we know of other artifact usages amongst the Hidden Christians for purposes of worship, particularly the shape of their home altars.

Continuing with our exploration then, would a Hidden Christian adherent at this grave, when entering the space to pray towards/to the "crucifix" or "church" stone, have placed a saké cup in oblation (filled with tea, as in the photo, or any other votive liquid, including actual saké) before this "God home" as well?[38] Moreover, would such have been done reverentially, or merely as "cover" in light of social constraints and public expectations? The mere presence of the structure might be thought to have a psychological effect, an influence strong or weak, perhaps not unlike how one feels when entering a synagogue, church, mosque, or temple for an interfaith event as a person who considers themselves to be of a religion other than that for which the building serves as a focal point. My own interpretive inclination, in light of the above and particularly when considered along with the *goshintai/gozensama* framework as it is admitted within the Hidden Christian faith perspective, is to understand this as being, on the whole, a syncretic element above all else, and my sense of that continues (strengthens) as the gaze shifts leftwards within Figure 2 and takes in the "five-wheeled tower," something which is described on the signboard and also liable to puzzle.

This tower too has nothing to do with Christianity, at least in the religion's non-Hidden Christian (i.e. mainstream) branches. Rather this is a Buddhist edifice, and although these can also frequently be encountered in daily life in Japan, they are not quite as ubiquitous as the Shinto *Kami* "houses", perhaps due to their association with funerary decoration. The "wheels" or "levels" or "stories" of these compounds correspond to one of the traditional natural elements of Buddhism; from bottom to top: earth, water, fire, wind, and space (or void).[39] Additionally, while the placement

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[38] The "Twenty-six Martyrs Museum" in Nagasaki City includes a replica of a Hidden Christian home altar, and on seeing it (unfortunately the museum does not allow photography) I was struck by how incredibly alike it was to a typical *kamidana* – complete with food and drink offerings (fried fish, rice, and saké) – and that despite its very permanently private location within an individual home, and likely concealed from view when not in use; see Oberg, "Facing a Form of". Turnbull, who visited the same museum in his own research, comments on this as well; Turnbull, *The Kakure Kirishitan*.

[39] Mark Schumacher, "Gorintō/Gorinto/Gorintou," *A to Z Photo Dictionary: Japanese Buddhist Statuary: Gods, Goddesses, Shinto Kami, Creatures & Demons*, https://www.onmarkproductions.com/html/5-elements-pagoda-gravestone.html, accessed March 09, 2021. The Japanese word *gorinto* (五輪塔) equates exactly with how it is registered above: "five-wheeled tower".

of an offering before this stacked grouping might seem slightly unusual to us, it is not outside of common Japanese Buddhist practice wherein similar gifts are laid at household *butsudan* Buddhist shrines, more "regular" family graves, or near photographs of deceased relatives, who – if one is generous with Buddhist themes and does not take such acts as simply more evidence of syncretistic blending, this time between ancestor worship and Buddhism – may be thought to help lead the reverent towards enlightenment along the lines of how a Bodhisattva might provide assistance on the path.[40] Yet concerning the pertinent point here within our study, we again find in this same sacred space an entirely non-Christian item, and once more it is not simply nearby to the monument purportedly celebrating the birthplace of Christianity in Shikoku but is a central and seemingly important aspect of it. Again our thoughts return to the centrality of iconography for the Hidden Christians, to the apparently-held beliefs of divine "inhabitation" in certain items, to the conceptual leakage that seems to have marked their communities from the very beginning, and now too ancestor worship and the petitioning of God/"God" for the dead have entered our literal and intellectual scene.

To try and make some sense of all this we must remember that not only was Christianity considered as a system of rites and rituals outlawed, but it was so with regards to thought as well – yet how could such even be accomplished? One can *think* anything; perhaps, but the comprehended is always bounded and limited by the parameters of one's thinking-world, one's possible avenues for cognition, as Edmund Husserl taught with his important construct of "horizon."[41] What lies outside or beyond the boundaries in which we mentally operate will not enter into consideration: for us on the "inside" such choices are simply not there, resting like buried treasures for which we do not even know that we need to dig. The possible, moreover, hangs on twin balances of input and processing, and if one is simultaneously exposed to anti-"foreign" sentiment such as pervaded Japan during the Edo Period (and, at times, later as well), expressed both by authorities and

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[40] Bodhisattvas, according to some strands of Buddhism (essentially exclusively) within the practice's Mahayana branch, are people who have become enlightened but have chosen to postpone their entry into nirvana to help other living creatures towards enlightenment, or are people on their way to Buddhahood, or people who have become enlightened or taken vows towards such and seek to assist others (views and interpretations vary). See: Jonathan A. Silk, "Bodhisattva: Buddhist Ideal," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, https://www.britannica.com/topic/bodhisattva, accessed March 09, 2021. Silk's overview emphasizes the aspect of "one on the way" as a Bodhisattva, but also mentions the "savior deity" role some play in local cultures due to a mixing of extant mythologies with Buddhist teachings.

[41] For inroads: Husserl, *The Essential Husserl*; Smith, *Husserl*.

neighbors (although presumably to a far lesser degree by the latter given the greater importance of daily concerns), and if one is also simultaneously surrounded by Shinto and Buddhist symbolism with its associated referents, then it seems inevitable that all such would be taken in (mentally adopted) to some degree. The same can be concluded, of course, with regards to ancestor veneration given the deeply cultural significance of family burial in Japan (and again, this is a generality for most of East and Southeast Asia, at least). One might further suppose that in addition to the Purgatory prayers the adoration of the Church's saints as taught to the Japanese Christians (before they became "Hidden") by the first missionaries and priests would be another contributing factor; a Buddhist tower, therefore, with its cosmic ciphers, linkage to socially universal funeral practices, and connection with the equally de rigueur *butsudan* altarpieces, would only too readily be placed by a Hidden Christian at one of their own communal graves. Crucially, since we might guess that this would not have been done with the form of awareness and purposiveness found in regular ecumenical efforts (the motivation here either being the essentially motivation-less "going through the motions" of accepted grave construction or possibly with thought to subterfuge in striving to be "hidden"), we are once more disposed to making an ascertainment of syncretism being strongly at work in the expression of sacrality to be found in this holy area (which, incidentally, is not of necessity a negative charge by any means; rather only an observation).

Yet particularly with this gravesite we find that we do not have enough to go on, and that makes the overall case of its spatiality and symbology both less clear and more interesting. The signboard alerts us to the inaugural Christian conversions on Shikoku occurring in 1564 (five years after the first missionary's arrival), that "after that" the governmental oppression of Christianity became more virulent, and then that the burial complex was discovered in 1975. When it was built (or possibly rebuilt; the items *could* be some hundreds of years old but each or all might well not be original), who is interred there, and what degree of secrecy was felt necessary at the time of construction are questions to which we have no answers; and perhaps never will. These queries still beckon, however, and so in a gesture towards them we now embark on an exploration of the final two constructions within our chosen grounds: the purportedly forthrightly Christian "crucifix stone", and its smaller pairing the "church stone."

In Figure 3 we have a more visible presentation of the "crucifix stone," and can note therein the figure carved in its centralized and topmost portion. While the details are crude and the style is quite rudimentary, we can decipher what appears to be a male face with a strong and long nose, a

square chin offsetting an equally square eye line and brow that sits beneath a forehead ridge which could almost be described as helmeted. The character engraved here might be sitting – the impression is nearly that of the meditative lotus position so frequently seen in portraitures of the Buddha – but the lower half of the body is blurred and indiscriminate in the stone itself; this is not a fault of the photograph, but the quality of the relic. In the very center of the image it seems that the man's two hands are resting on what could be his lap (if seated in a cross-legged manner), his knees (if on a chair or squatting), or merely resting in front of his lower torso (if meant to be standing or upright). We are perhaps free to conclude however we may wish on these or other interpretive options, but what is clear is that none of them are indicative of arms spread on a cross, nor does it – directly visually at least – appear possible to take this representation as a crucifix of any form; but again, such could indeed be the very plan.

Let us think again on the "Hidden": Despite the foregoing description's resemblance with common features of Buddhist icons, a portrayal of a Christ glyph in this context does make counterintuitive sense from the perspective of the two interrelated aspects of *hiddenness* (and thus any emphasis would need to be not on a "realistic" depiction but quite the opposite), and the practical reasoning that at this moment historically in Japan there would have been next to zero acquaintance with the long legacy of crucifixion related artworks such as had flourished in Europe and its outlets in the colonial world nor with the (in some ways parallel) Middle Eastern and North African centers of Early Christianity and derivative religious cultures that developed over the intervening centuries there. In short, a Japanese sculptor may purely not have known how to go about indicating a Christ figure and thereby instead created something based rather more on familiarity: a Buddha-like emblem taken from the vast environmental ambience. Of further interest to us here, and directly connected with the general Hidden Christian methodology of taking "safe" statuary and altar accoutrements as substitutes for what under other social realities they might prefer (e.g. actual Church iconography, or at a minimum, objects close to such), is a point made by Hans Belting – in the context of discussing Virgin Mary avatars from a European art history perspective – that for a believer pictorial accuracy has very little to do with an icon's felt potency in regards to the religionist her/himself.[42]

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[42] Hans Belting, *The End of the History of Art*, trans. Christopher S. Wood (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987); see also Belting's more recent *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

It might seem then that if this is extended we could take anything to "be" anything else whatsoever; the *kamidana* in a Hidden Christian home becomes a miniaturized church, the Buddhist funerary tower morphs into the Mount of Olives, the grave of one's fellow congregants a channel to the God/"God" of Israel as taught by the Christian so-claimed Son and Messiah. If layers of interpretive meaning like these can persist and be sustained in a manageable and conceptually aligned manner, we would have a space open not only to ecumenical practices but further to vastly interfaith ones. We would also, though, have such tenuousness that immediate charges of relativism could be made, and in that accusations of vacuity. Whatever the phenomenological validity might be for any particular worshiper at this "crucifix stone" – or anything like it – to have (e.g.) Buddha be Christ not only introduces the possibility of confusion but actively seems to beckon it forth. Perhaps issues like these are a part of what drove the Hidden Christians, and most likely without even noticing they were thus engaged, into the very Shinto, Buddhist, and ancestral venerating acts of physical offerings being placed before images which were then prayed *to* (as opposed to *towards*). How much "Christian" is left in this "Hidden Christianity"?

Finally in our gravesite is the "church stone" of Figure 4, an item that appears most noteworthy only in the somewhat pagoda-like style of manufacture and vastly reduced stature vis-à-vis the "crucifix stone" erected next to it. As for the architectural rendering, while the European missionaries who came to Japan did order churches to be constructed along the lines found in their home countries, once the religion was banned it is only too natural for us to assume that "church" models as well would have altered and disguised their formations. A shape not terribly unlike the "five-wheeled tower" nearby fits in smoothly in this context, and we must remind ourselves that this is really only a substitute, a token for the "true thing" which did not exist as such in Christianity-prohibiting Japan (e.g. as a grand building for mass public worship), but which would again in the course of time. Perhaps that hope was held out by the makers of the grave.

More intriguing, however, is the diminutiveness of this "church" when compared with the "crucifix" that it neighbors. Thinking in phenomenological and psychological terms may provide some insight here: if one can only meet in small, or perhaps familial, groupings to conduct the rites of one's faith, and if even such minimized practices must be kept secret, then the feelings (experientially) one has (/one generates) for the enabling objects of religious expression could reasonably be taken to increase in significance at a rate potentially inverse to that for which those for the (barred) community would decrease. In other words, an adherent could be expected

to value that which she has at hand over that for which she may desire but cannot – at present anyway – attain: this statue now over the wish, however pleasant, of gathering en masse. Still – she thinks – there are others like me; comfort would surely be taken in that, and perhaps such would be enough to account for the presence of a "church stone" in any dimension being included within the ground. Regardless of how marginalized and scattered we may be – our Hidden Christian continues to ruminate – I am not alone; we are many.

When judged additionally from a Christian theological perspective it might not be surprising to have Christ presented as more prominent than the community oriented around his abstraction and the role that figuring plays within the faith community. This is not to claim a lessening of Church – far from it, the cruciality of any belief system's social side cannot be overemphasized – simply to point out that for the followers' affective aspects as undergone within the circumstances we have detailed and imagined heretofore, the projected Christ image would most probably take precedence. Comparatively, we might also envision how crucifixes and crosses are arranged in modern and freely expressive church buildings: often central and quite large.

On this potential relation of relative size and associated valuing, while we did note the equal offertory cups placed on the stone altars before each gravesite element (Figure 2 shows this clearly), despite the gesturing thereby implied of an evenly felt need to "sacrifice" and "offer" between these aspects on the part of the believers, such does not necessarily, I think, communicate anything about personal importance. On the other hand, there might be a hint of this very equating (big equals consequential; whether intended or not is very hard to discern) in the much larger proportions of the platform in front of the "crucifix stone"; but then again those details might merely be the result of chance and the availability of materials. Curiously too an item like the "church stone" in this site was/is probably more decorative than anything, being neither icon per se (such as its juxtaposed "crucifix" statue), nor a "borrowed" emblem from the culturally standardized Buddhist and Shinto realms like the "five-wheeled tower" or the "*Kami* house", also to be found in the same sacred space. The dual (or disguised) usage of this small portion of the burial ground might actually rather be single and not binary: it is simply there for the viewing benefit of everyone, whatever the aims of a visitor's heart and mind in their approach; neither ecumenical nor syncretic, but purely aesthetic.

3. A Bow at Exit

We are left to wonder. The signboard is tantalizing, almost teasing in what it describes and what we therefrom ascertain about what might have occurred at this secluded but significant sacramental location. Its facets offer glimpses of many conceptual and theological realms: Shinto, Buddhist, *somehow* Christian, above all very Japanese. A worshiper at this site may have held any of the foregoing numinous alignments, or potentially even each of them, and practiced such with a reverence that would be authentic in any setting, time, or place. On reflection, the grave is probably more syncretistic than it is ecumenical, and although it could also be adjudicated as interfaith (but not dialogically so), that aspect is substantially subdued due to one side (the Hidden Christian) needing to remain as invisible as possible in deference to the political concerns prevalent for the community which first placed and participated in the monument we have been considering.

Nevertheless, that same group of people – whomever they were, and however many of them moved through this sacred enclosure – has bequeathed us with a gift, they have shared a glimpse into what was or could well have been, they have rendered a vision of a lifeworld cut from history's pages. Perhaps in some ways, traces of this faith-directed phenomenology could yet be found in our own era; a simple visit might provide a spark for a mind sufficiently attuned, an ideational perspective appropriately adjusted. This space, this tiny cutting of a slice of land far off the beaten track of contemporary Japan, is "officially" disguised and it is dual; but truly more so it is myriad. In dwelling on that final term, we might think as well that anything holy must indeed be thousandfold – for what could possibly contain such mystery?