

St. Francis Xavier's Discovery of Japanese Buddhism

A Chapter in the European Discovery of Buddhism (PART 3: FROM YAMAGUCHI TO INDIA 1551-1552)

URS APP

From Brawn to Brain

IN India and Indonesia, Francis Xavier had baptized entire villages of heathens after having them repeat a few prayers and the principal tenets of the new faith:

After preaching to them, I ask all, both large and small, if they truly believe in each article of the faith; they all answer that they do. I then recite each article in a loud voice, and at each one of these I ask them if they believe; and they, folding their arms over their breast in the form of a cross, answer that they do. I then baptize them, giving to each one his name in writing. The men then return to their homes and send their wives and families, whom I then baptize in the same way as I had baptized the men.¹

He urged his fellow missionaries to go for lots of babies: "Constantly keep moving from village to village, baptizing the newborn infants."²

¹ Georg Schurhammer and Josef Wicki, *Epistolae S. Francisci Xaverii aliaque eius scripta*, Roma: Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu, 1944/45, letter no. 48, from Cochinchina to the Society of Jesus in Rome, January 27, 1545. Translation by Joseph Costelloe, *The Letters and Instructions of Francis Xavier*, St. Louis, Missouri: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992, p. 117. When no translator is mentioned, the translation is by the author.

² Letter from Negapatam to Francisco Mansilhas on the Fishery Coast (April 7, 1545), Schurhammer & Wicki, 1944/45, letter no. 50; translation by Costelloe 1992, p. 125.

APP: FRANCIS XAVIER'S DISCOVERY (3)

Since the missionaries usually did not speak the local language and simply read their instructions and prayers from a booklet that had previously been translated, there was no need for rhetorical gifts or a brilliant mind but rather for good legs and an ample supply of virtue:

Individuals who have no talent for hearing confessions, preaching, or doing things pertaining to the Society, after they have completed their Exercises and have served in lowly offices for some months, will do great service in these regions if they have physical as well as spiritual strength. For in these pagan lands there is no need for learning beyond what is required for the teaching of prayers, the visiting of villages, and the baptizing of newborn infants, many of whom die without baptism for want of one to baptize them, since we cannot reach all the villages. [. . .] There is no need for learning for those who are to go to the infidels.³

In Indonesia, a land peopled by tribes that are at best “very barbarous and full of treachery” and dotted with islands “where they lend each other their aged fathers when they wish to have a feast,”⁴ there was even more need for well-developed muscles. Racked by earthquakes and dotted with volcanoes, these islands seemed to Xavier to be the very entrance to hell:

For want of one to preach the torments of hell to the infidels of these islands, God lets the lower regions open up for the confusion of these pagans and their abominable sins.⁵

In Christian cosmology, hell was located right under our feet in the boiling entrails of the earth. When the natives asked Xavier about the volcanoes, he explained: “I told them that it was a hell to which all those who worship idols go.”⁶ In the same letter that reported this, Xavier raved about his meeting with Anjirō and the prospect of bringing

³ Schurhammer & Wicki, 1944/45, letter no. 47, from Cochin to Ignatius of Loyola in Rome, January 27, 1545. Translation by Costelloe 1992, p. 114.

⁴ Schurhammer & Wicki, 1944/45, letter no. 55, from Amboina to the Jesuit companions in Europe, May 10, 1546. Translation by Costelloe 1992, p. 142.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁶ Schurhammer & Wicki, 1944/45, letter no. 59, from Cochin to the Jesuit companions in Europe, January 20, 1548. Translation by Costelloe 1992, p. 173.

the good tidings to a people with more civilised cravings than the arms and legs of their neighbors' father or the odd member of the missionary corps:

If all the Japanese are as eager to know as is Anjirō, it seems to me that this race is the most curious of all the peoples that have been discovered. This Anjirō [. . .] is a man who is very eager to know, which is a sign of one who will make much of himself, and who will in a short time come to a knowledge of the truth.⁷

When justifying his decision to go to Japan without prior approval, Xavier again emphasized that the Japanese are “a very curious race, eager to obtain news about God and natural things.”⁸ Since the Christian God is the creator of all natural things, including human reason, Xavier foresaw the opportunity of a lifetime:

I asked Anjirō if the people of Japan would become Christians if I went with him to his country. He replied that those of his country would not immediately become Christians but would first ask many questions and would see how I answered them and what I believed and, above all, if I lived in accordance with what I said. If I did two things well, that is, if I spoke well and replied satisfactorily to their questions, and lived beyond reproach, within half a year after they had come to know me, the king and the nobility and all the other prudent people would become Christians, since they are, according to him, a race ruled solely by reason.⁹

After almost three months in Japan, Xavier saw some of his expectations confirmed: “They are a people of great good will, very sociable, and eager to know”¹⁰—in fact, those whom he had met “are the best that have as yet been discovered; and it seems to me that no other pa-

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁸ Schurhammer & Wicki, 1944/45, letter no. 72, from Cochin to Ignatius of Loyola in Rome, January 14, 1549. Costelloe 1992, p. 227.

⁹ Schurhammer & Wicki, 1944/45, letter no. 59, from Cochin to the Jesuit companions in Europe, January 20, 1548. Translation by Costelloe 1992, p. 179.

¹⁰ Schurhammer & Wicki, 1944/45, letter no. 90, from Kagoshima to the Jesuits in Goa, November 5, 1549. Costelloe 1992, p. 298.

gan race will be found that will surpass the Japanese."¹¹ However, Anjirō's half-year timetable turned out to be less than accurate. When Xavier left Japan about two years later and wrote his reports from India, his requests sounded very much as if the task of missionizing Japan had only just begun. The proud mass-producer of Christians suddenly sounded almost humbled, begging his European brethren to send him a very different breed of assistants:

There is a need for trained scholars, especially for good *artystas*,¹² to answer their questions, and for those who are *sophystas*¹³ to catch them up as soon as they contradict themselves. These bonzes are deeply ashamed when they are caught in contradictions, or when they are unable to reply.¹⁴

While the healthy young missionaries in Indonesia had to be prepared to run away from poisoned arrows and earthquakes, the *artystas* and *sophystas* destined for Japan would have to face some rather more protracted and sophisticated forms of torture:

They will suffer greater persecutions than many think; they will be pestered by visits and questions at all hours of the day and during part of the night; and they will be called to the homes of important people who cannot be gainsaid. They will have no time for prayer, meditation, and contemplation, or for any spiritual recollection; they will not be able to say Mass, at least in the beginning; they will be continuously occupied with answering questions; they will lack the time to recite the office, and even to eat and sleep. These people are very demanding, especially with strangers, whom they hold of little account and are always ridiculing.¹⁵

Such words do not carry the perfume of piety and edification; rather, they exhibit the hard edge of real missionary experience in Yamaguchi.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 297.

¹² These are Masters of Arts, i.e., University graduates.

¹³ "*Sophystas*" are people trained in the art of dialectics and rhetoric.

¹⁴ Schurhammer & Wicki, 1944/45, letter no. 97, from Cochin to Ignatius of Loyola in Rome, January 29, 1552. Costelloe 1992, p. 346.

¹⁵ Schurhammer & Wicki, 1944/45, letter no. 96, from Cochin to the Jesuit companions in Europe, January 29, 1552. Costelloe 1992, p. 329.

Clearly, the Japan mission had hit a snag of such proportions as to confound the “Apostle of India and Indonesia”—a snag that, under circumstances devoid of miracles,¹⁶ could even have thrown him out of the race to become the canonized “Apostle of Japan” . . .

Grandes Laberintos

While researchers and writers of fiction are understandably fascinated by the dramatic stories of Luis Frois—for example, Xavier’s sudden enlightenment as to the difference between Dainichi and God that led to the use of the word *Deus*¹⁷—and are fond of citing the edifying ramblings of the missionaries, the “business” parts of the letters from Yamaguchi, Cochin, and Goa tell a more sober story. If passages about the *deeds* were often designed to generate pious feelings, those about the *needs* were pretty hard-nosed: they aim at concrete assistance rather than torrents of sympathetic tears, and thus inform us about the real problems the mission was facing: ignorance of language (thus the call for interpreters),¹⁸ harsh climate (thus the call for weatherproof Flemish or German missionaries),¹⁹ and above all the lack of educated

¹⁶ Appropriately, miracles attributed to Xavier patched up some of his shortcomings. In 1556, Captain Antonio Perreira, who had known Xavier personally, testified under oath that “wherever Father Magister Francisco went, he learned and spoke the local language in very few days, as was the case in Malabar, Maluco and Japan.” When canonization was approaching in 1614, the thirteenth witness of the information proceedings in Lissabon informed the authorities that he had personally heard from his cousin, a captain in Japanese waters, that when Xavier preached in Japan and China, he spoke Portuguese, but that the audience all heard him speak in their own mother tongues. See Schurhammer 1928, p. 6.

¹⁷ Luis Frois, *Die Geschichte Japans (1549–1578). Nach der Handschrift der Ajuda-bibliothek in Lissabon übersetzt und kommentiert von G. Schurhammer und E. A. Voretzsch*, Leipzig 1926, p. 15.

¹⁸ For example, Schurhammer & Wicki, 1944/45, letter no. 92, from Kagoshima to Father Paulo in Goa, November 5, 1549. Costelloe 1992, p. 315 speaks of the need to educate Japanese and Chinese boys to later serve as interpreters, and the same letter (p. 316) orders the education of two Japanese bonzes for this purpose.

¹⁹ Schurhammer & Wicki, 1944/45, letter no. 97, from Cochin to Ignatius of Loyola in Rome, January 29, 1552, Costelloe 1992, p. 346; letter no. 98 to Father Simão Rodrigues in Portugal, written in Cochin on January 30, 1552, Costelloe 1992, p. 349; letter no. 107 to Father Simão Rodrigues in Portugal, written in Goa on April 7, 1552, Costelloe 1992, p. 375; and letter no. 110 to Ignatius of Loyola in Rome, written in Goa on April 9, 1552, Costelloe 1992, p. 385.

APP: FRANCIS XAVIER'S DISCOVERY (3)

men able to understand the enemy, stand up to the bonzes, defeat them in dispute, and explain not just heaven and hell but also the natural world:

They must also be learned in order to be able to answer the many questions that are posed by the Japanese. It would be well if they were good Masters of Arts, and it would certainly be no loss if they were dialecticians, so that they could catch the Japanese in contradictions when they dispute with them. It would also be good if they knew something about the celestial sphere, since the Japanese are delighted with learning about the movements of the heavens, the eclipses of the sun, the waxing and waning of the moon, and how rain, snow and hail, thunder, lightning, comets, and other natural phenomena are produced. The explanation of such matters is a great help in gaining the good will of the people.²⁰

Such goodwill, of course, was extremely important in the given circumstances; hampered by their insufficient command of the Japanese language and startled by questions that did not even steer clear of doubts about God's goodness, the impressive results of Greek, Arab, and modern European research were welcome aids to convince the idolaters of tenets of faith (such as the purgatory) that were hardly secure from attacks of reason, that most important virtue of the Japanese.²¹ In the letters written just after Xavier's departure from Yamaguchi, Cosme de Torres sounds similar notes:

Those who will come to these regions must be very knowledgeable in order to be able to respond to the very elevated and difficult questions which they pose from morning till into the night. They are so exigent that from the day Father Magister Francis came into this town, which is now five months ago, not a single day has passed where priests and laymen have not

²⁰ Schurhammer & Wicki, 1944/45, letter no. 110 to Ignatius of Loyola in Rome, written in Goa on April 9, 1552; Costelloe 1992, p. 385.

²¹ According to Torres, the Japanese "let themselves guide by reason as much as the Spaniards or even more." Torres, first Yamaguchi letter (September 29, 1551, to the Jesuit companions in Valencia); Schurhammer 1929, p. 47 (original edited in Schurhammer 1929, p. 94).

asked all sorts of questions from the morning through the major part of the night, for example how God is and where, why one cannot see him, how it is that souls have a beginning but no end, and other extremely difficult questions. [. . .] It is most necessary for those who come to these regions that they know all spiritual teachings in order to be able to teach them how wrong and mendacious their meditations are and to rebut them.²²

Having tried and failed to answer questions such as that about the reason why souls have a beginning but no end, Torres was very aware of the fragility of the missionary enterprise in Japan. He openly acknowledged that at the outset the missionaries had "lacked experience," adding cryptically that since then "they had learned something of the language [alguna cousa da lingoa], and great labyrinths had revealed themselves."²³

What did Torres mean by *grandes laberintos*? Did he allude to the Dainichi-mix-up that had pretty much erased most achievements that the missionaries had fought for in their first two years in Japan? Or was it dawning on him and his fellow missionaries that what they had run into here was not just a simple *cul-de-sac*—a wrong word, a bad interpreter, a simple slipup to be righted in one fell swoop—but rather an extremely confusing array of *laberintos*, each one of them capable of causing years of wasted effort?

For the Japanese in Yamaguchi, literally the whole world with its heavens and hells had broken loose in 1551. Was it really round, as the Jesuit fathers tried to prove to their startled Yamaguchi visitors, and encircled by a number of spheres containing the moon, the sun, the planets, and the fixed stars? Were the stars really moved about by *Dainichi* a.k.a. *Deus* alias *hotoke*? Was there really a continent unknown to the Japanese that was peopled exclusively by negroes? Was the whole universe really created in just six days? Was there a

²² Torres, first Yamaguchi letter (September 29, 1551, to the Jesuit companions in Valencia); Schurhammer 1929, p. 52 (original pp. 96-97).

²³ Torres, second Yamaguchi letter. *Cartas que os Padres e Irmãos da Companhia de Jesus escreuerão dos Reynos de Iapão e China*, Evora 1598, 16v (letter dated September 29, 1551). German translation in Schurhammer 1929, p. 54.

APP: FRANCIS XAVIER'S DISCOVERY (3)

region called Europe, the richest in the world, where the pope, the most powerful man on earth and representative of *hotoke*, was residing? The visitors, we are told, asked about anything from the stars to hailstones and from *Tenjiku* to Europe, and of course the Europeans had much to recommend themselves and their creed: the missionaries' belief in paradise and purgatory stood on equal ground with their spherical earth circled by sun and moon. If the *Tenjikus* knew so much about the seas and the sky, foreign countries and customs, guns and lenses, etc., why not also about the earth and history, man and his soul, heaven and hell?

They are so curious and importunate in their questioning and so eager to know that they never ceased asking us questions and telling others the answers which they had received from us. They did not know that the world was round, nor did they know the course of the sun. They asked about these and other things, for example, about comets, lightnings, rain and snow, and similar phenomena. They were very content and satisfied with our replies and explanations; and they deemed us to be learned men, something that was of some help in gaining credit for our words.²⁴

There were plenty of additional reasons to pay a visit to the missionaries at Daidōji: the first dark-skinned Indian in these regions, Xavier's servant Amador; the stunningly ornamented *o-kyō*²⁵ called *glossa ordinaria*, penned on animal skin instead of paper; the brocade ceremonial robes; the image of Kannon²⁶ painted in perspective; the magic holy water that cures illnesses;²⁷ the powerful spells and mantras; the bless-

²⁴ Schurhammer & Wicki, 1944/45, letter no. 96, from Cochin to the Jesuit companions in Europe, January 29, 1552. Costelloe 1992, p. 334. The fact that of these explanations by Xavier probably only that about the spherical earth would hold up today shows how relative the Jesuits' superiority of knowledge really was.

²⁵ Since the term *seisho* 聖書 (Bible) is a much more recent invention, it is likely that the missionaries used the term *o-kyō* 御經 for their sacred scriptures—the very word that the Japanese use for the Buddhist *sūtras* that are supposed to relate the words of the Buddha.

²⁶ See part 1 of this article, *The Eastern Buddhist* XXX, 1 (1997), p. 56.

²⁷ The importance of the hope for healing in these early days can only be guessed. But in a letter of September 23, 1555 from Hirado the Jesuits in India, Baltazar Gago

ings by the magic sign of the cross; the strange shoes and clothes; the sight of people eating with their bare hands; the large noses; the colored eyes behind eyeglasses; the clock; the exotic spices from *Ten-jiku*; and so on. Such wonders from an unknown world may get little mention in the missionaries' letters, concerned as they are with more spiritual fare, but to the Japanese all of this was utterly sensational.²⁸

It was in this city of Yamaguchi, where the "monks from the Western regions" had received official permission "to establish their monastic community [at Daidōji] for the purpose of promulgating their Buddha Dharma,"²⁹ that an invaluable door to the understanding of the rival sects of Japan was opening up during the spring and summer of 1551. Though Brother Juan Fernández had during the first two years in Japan made some progress in understanding and speaking Japanese and was serving as Xavier's and Torres' interpreter, what he said and what he understood was—like the instruction materials from which the missionaries read—still set in Anjirō's terms. But having learned "something of the language" was not the only reason for the laborers to reveal themselves. The second, and arguably more important one, was the help from educated Japanese sympathizers familiar with the intricacies of Buddhist doctrine and organization. Back in India, Xavier was to reminisce:

Many of those who became Christians were nobles; and after they had become Christians, they were such great friends of ours that I could never end writing about it. And they thus gave us a very faithful account of all that is contained in the laws of the pagans.³⁰

reported that in Funai almost all converts were poor or sick. *Cartas que los Padres y Hermanos de la Compañia de Jesus, que andan en los Reynos de Japon escribieron a los de la misma Compañia*, Alcalá 1575, p. 38 ff. See Schurhammer 1928, p. 59.

²⁸ Japanese *Nanban* (Southern Barbarian) screens feature such details beautifully; stunning examples are found in the Kōbe Municipal Museum, the Tokyo National Museum, etc.

²⁹ This is the text of the official permit by the ruler of Yamaguchi from September 16 of 1552 that was affixed in the streets of Yamaguchi for all to read. See part 2 of this article series.

³⁰ Schurhammer & Wicki, 1944/45, letter no. 96, from Cochin to the Jesuit companions in Europe, January 29, 1552. Costelloe 1992, p. 333. Of course, Xavier and his

APP: FRANCIS XAVIER'S DISCOVERY (3)

The "great friends" of the new sect were, true to the Japanese tradition of sectarian competition, happy to inform the reformers from *Ten-jiku* about the shortcomings of the rival sects:

Many revealed to us the deceits of the bonzes and of their sects. If it were not for them, we would never have become familiar with the idolatries of Japan.³¹

A Japanese scholar so disenchanted with traditional Buddhism as to leave the priesthood had turned into a particularly important source of information to the Jesuits:

A man who had studied many years in Bandu and was deemed to be very learned became a Christian in the city of Yamaguchi. Before our arrival in Japan, he had ceased to be a bonze, had become a layman, and had married. He says that when he ceased to be a bonze, it was because it seemed to him that the laws of Japan were not true. He consequently did not believe in them and always adored the one who created the world. The Christians in Yamaguchi were very happy when this man was baptized, since he was considered to be the most learned man in the city.³²

However disparate the intentions of the informers and of the recipients might have been: they converged in letting the Jesuit missionaries finally put a foot into the door to a startlingly different religious universe.

The Torres Letters

Before leaving Yamaguchi, Xavier had ordered Cosme de Torres and Juan Fernández, whose Japanese was just two years old,³³ to try to find out more about the *laberintos* that had revealed themselves. Xavier was aware that neither of them was really equipped to stand up to the

companions just caught a peek and were, as the remainder of this article will show, very far from being informed about "all that is contained in the laws of the pagans."

³¹ Ibid., p. 335.

³² Ibid., p. 340.

³³ On various opinions about the degree of Juan Fernández' language proficiency see Schurhammer 1982, vol. 4, pp. 280-281.

bonzes' arguments;³⁴ but they could at least gather some basic information about the opponents. The two obliged quite rapidly: before his departure to India in November of 1551, Xavier was handed four letters from Yamaguchi, two of which were addressed to him. These letters document the first real advance in the European study of Buddhism. The first two are from the hand of Cosme de Torres; they are addressed to the Jesuits in Valencia and India and were written on the same day, September 29, 1551, i.e. about two weeks after Xavier's departure from Yamaguchi. The third Yamaguchi letter (also by Torres) and the fourth (by Juan Fernández) were written three weeks later, on October 20, and are addressed to Xavier.

It appears that in Yamaguchi the Jesuit missionaries had prepared a set of questions for each of the major groupings of Japanese idolatry. These questions were designed to entangle visitors to the Daidōji in contradictions and defeat them in dispute. In his report about the events of the day following Xavier's departure from Yamaguchi, Torres wrote:

There were not many difficult questions that day, because the time went by while they made fun of us and of what we said, without wishing to pay attention to our words, with the exception of a priest of the *Shakas*. We asked him why Shaka was born 800³⁵ times, and the rest of what one used to ask of those who worship Shaka, and also about their living habits.³⁶

In his letters, Torres distinguishes between four major groups of idolaters in Japan. The *first group* worships a man called *Xaca*:³⁷

There are some who worship an idol called *Xaca*. They say that he had been born eight thousand times before he was born of a woman; and before he was born of his mother, he

³⁴ Xavier judged that Cosme de Torres and Juan Fernández did not have the qualifications to go to the Japanese universities except maybe as interpreters for more able men. See Schurhammer & Wicki, 1944/45, letter no. 97, from Cochin to Ignatius of Loyola in Rome, January 29, 1552; Costelloe 1992, p. 347.

³⁵ Both *Cartas* 1575 and *Cartas* 1598 have this number; in other places such as that from the first Torres letter that was cited above, however, Shaka is usually said to have been born 8000 times.

³⁶ Torres, third Yamaguchi letter; *Cartas* 1598 18 v; Schurhammer 1929, pp. 61–62.

³⁷ Shaka 釋迦: the sage of the Shakya clan, Shakyamuni Buddha.

APP: FRANCIS XAVIER'S DISCOVERY (3)

served the people for a thousand years so that he might sanctify himself by carrying wood, water, and other things necessary for the service of men. This is the most important one whom they worship, for they say that he has explained all the past laws.³⁸

Torres explains that among the sects that worship *Shaka*, there are those who worship him exclusively, called *Foquexo*,³⁹ and others "who worship him along with all the demons."

The *second group* consists of worshipers of an idol called *Amida*,⁴⁰ who is "sometimes painted as a man and sometimes as a woman":⁴¹

They say that when he was very old, he said to himself that the good had no need of him or anybody else for saving themselves; but for the wicked, no matter how wicked they might ever have been, he revealed to them a very great remedy for their salvation, and this is that whoever in the hour of his death pronounces with a stout heart this word "Amidanbut" will be saved.⁴²

³⁸ Torres, first Yamaguchi letter (September 29, 1551, to the Jesuit companions in Valencia); Schurhammer 1929, p. 48 (original pp. 94-95). English translation from Schurhammer 1982, vol. 4, p. 268.

³⁹ *Hokke-shū* 法華宗: These are sects whose central scripture is the Lotus sūtra. The Japanese Tendai-sect 天台宗, founded by Saichō 最澄 (766/767-822), was also called *Hokke-shū* or *Tendai-hokke-shū*; thus it attacked the *Nichiren-shū* 日蓮宗 that equally focuses on the Lotus sūtra and in the beginning also referred to itself as *Hokke-shū*. Here, Torres may distinguish between the Nichiren sect 日蓮宗 (exclusive worship of Shaka) and the Tendai sect 天台宗 (worship of Shaka "and all the demons").

⁴⁰ *Amida* 阿彌陀 or *Amidabutsu* 阿彌陀佛 refers to Amitābha Buddha, the Buddha of Infinite Light, who is the central figure of the *Jōdomon* 淨土門 (Pure Land teachings). Various forms of these teachings were propagated in Japan by the Yūzū-nembutsu sect founded by Ryōnin, the Jōdo sect founded by Hōnen, the Jōdo-shin sect founded by Shinran, and the Ji sect founded by Ippen.

⁴¹ Torres, first Yamaguchi letter; Schurhammer 1929, p. 49 (original p. 95). English translation from Schurhammer 1982, vol. 4, p. 268. This may be a mixup with Kannon 觀音 (Avalokiteshvara), the bodhisattva of great compassion.

⁴² Torres, first Yamaguchi letter; Schurhammer 1929, p. 49 (original p. 95). English translation from Schurhammer 1982, vol. 4, p. 268. *Amidanbut* refers to the invocation of *Amidabutsu* 阿彌陀佛 that is usually called *nembutsu* 念佛. In Japan, the most usual formula is "namu-amida-butsu" 南無阿彌陀佛: "I put my faith in Amitābha Buddha."

This group has, according to Torres, a great number of members because it promises salvation to all, good and evil, and is divided into two branches: the *Ycoxos*,⁴³ and those who worship “both him and the demons.”⁴⁴

A *third group* is said to “worship the sun and the moon,” calling them *Dios* because they “create all things,” and all the things created by God are God himself.⁴⁵ Because even *el demonio* is God’s creature, they worship the devil, too. Among them are “very great magicians” [grandisimos hechizeros] that earn much money. They “are very ignorant, and it does not take much to refute them because of the many stupidities which they maintain and believe.”⁴⁶

The *fourth group* mentioned by Torres consists of the *Jenxus*⁴⁷ of which there are also two branches.

One kind says that there is no soul, and that when a man dies, everything dies, since they say that what has been created out of nothing [crió de nada] returns to nothing [se convierte en nada]. These are men of great meditation [grandes meditaciones], and it is difficult to make them understand the law of God. It is quite a job [mucho trabajo] to refute them.⁴⁸

⁴³ *Ikkō-shū* 一向宗 (also called Jōdo-shinshū 浄土真宗) founded by Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1262).

⁴⁴ Ibid. Presumably, this second branch bundles other variations of Pure Land Buddhism.

⁴⁵ Schurhammer 1929, p. 49 and 1982, vol. 4, p. 268, thinks this group refers to Shintō. However, this would leave out the Shingon sect completely—the sect with which the missionaries probably had most dealings until they found out about the Dainichi problem. To me, the identification of all particular things with their source (Dainichi?), the sharp attack at the end, and the link with “great magicians” (see next note) all suggest that Torres here refers to the Shingon sect whose teachings were also used in Shintō movements such as Ryōbu Shintō 两部神道 which held that the deity enshrined in Ise is Dainichi. This is supported by a later letter of Torres (*Cartas* 1598, 75 r); see Haas 1904, p. 367.

⁴⁶ Ibid. The “great magicians” probably refer to the Yamabushis 山伏, the members of the *Shugendō* 修験道 mountain ascetics associated with the esoteric Tendai 天台 and Shingon 真言 sects.

⁴⁷ *Zen-shū* 禅宗: the Zen sect. The two branches are the Rinzai sect 臨濟宗 and the Sōtō sect 曹洞宗.

⁴⁸ Torres, first Yamaguchi letter; Schurhammer 1929, pp. 49–50 (original p. 95). English translation with some changes from Schurhammer 1982, vol. 4, p. 268.

APP: FRANCIS XAVIER'S DISCOVERY (3)

Since there is no follow-up, it is unclear whether this description of the teaching of "one kind" only refers to one branch of the Zen sect, or to both. At any rate, the "Zen" view that there is no soul at all is contrasted with two different views held by "others":

There are others who say that souls [las animas] have existed and will exist forever, and that with the death of the body each of the four elements returns to its own place, as does the soul that returns into what it was before it animated that body.

Others say that after the death of the body, the souls enter different bodies and thus ceaselessly are born and die again.⁴⁹

This is the first discussion of two basic conceptions of transmigration that were to play an important role in the European discovery of Buddhism.⁵⁰ In his second letter, written on the same day, Torres compresses the information about the Zen sect and transmigration as follows:

There are others that they call *Ienxús* of which there are two kinds; they are men of great meditations, which is why it is necessary that the *padres* coming to these regions be scholars [letrados], in order to lead them out of their errors and to refute them. There are others who say that when the bodies have died, the souls return into other bodies and that in this manner they would always be born and die.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ibid., Schurhammer 1929, p. 50 (original p. 95). The four elements (*shidai* 四大; skt. *mahā-bhūta*) are the four components that constitute material objects; earth (firmness), water (fluidity), fire (heat) and wind (movement). What "animates" these elements (here called "soul") would point to Buddhism's "consciousness" that carries a much broader meaning than "personal soul"—a doctrine which could hardly be reconciled with the basic Buddhist teaching of the absence of a permanent self or soul (*anātman*, jap. *muga* 無我).

⁵⁰ About three centuries after Torres, Schopenhauer was to call the first one the "esoteric" conception of transmigration or *palingenesis* where another consciousness is formed on the basis of the same elements. The second one he called the "exoteric" idea of *metempsychosis* where an individual soul migrates into another body. See Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga und Paralipomena* vol. 2, §140. Zürich: Diogenes Verlag, 1977, (Collected Works vol. 9, pp. 299–300).

⁵¹ *Cartas* 1598, p. 17 v. German translation in Schurhammer 1929, p. 58.

Torres does not mention any specific number of sects, but he appears to mention seven:

- 1) Worshipers of Shaka (Hokkeshū = Nichiren sect)
- 2) Worshipers of Shaka and other demons (Tendai?)
- 3) Worshipers of Amida (Ikkō-shū = Jōdo-shin sect)
- 4) Worshipers of Amida and other demons (Pure Land?)
- 5) Worshipers of sun and moon, magicians (unnamed; Shingon/Yamabushi?)
- 6) Zen (unnamed first branch)
- 7) Zen (unnamed second branch)

As is to be expected, Torres criticized the clergy for the “vice of sodomy” in which these “very carnal” clergymen indulge “while saying that this is no sin.”⁵² They are also chided for introducing in these regions “many other things which are very great insults to God; which is why they are so irritated when they hear us preach our holy catholic faith.”⁵³ This remark would indicate that it was primarily the missionaries’ criticism of the Buddhist clergy’s morality and behavior that created tensions in Yamaguchi.⁵⁴ With regard to the ways in which the Buddhist clergy supports itself, Torres raises serious and quite detailed charges:

The priests of this land spread many other heresies in order to

⁵² Torrez’ and Xavier’s critique of sodomy was rather mild in comparison to their colleague Barzaeus in Hormuz who received repeated guidance from Xavier. This man preached from the pulpit that, according to civil and ecclesiastical law, those guilty of sodomy should be burned as heretics. See Schurhammer 1982, vol. 4, p. 379.

⁵³ Unfortunately, Torres does not specify what these great insults consist in. Torres, first Yamaguchi letter (September 29, 1551, to the Jesuit companions in Valencia); Schurhammer 1929, p. 47 (original p. 93).

⁵⁴ The Fernández letter (Schurhammer 1929, p. 84; original p. 109) supports this view:

The priests and many laymen say many things about us. They are full of envy toward us because they are hurt by our reprehensions about the sins in which they live.

This kind of criticism and the resulting tensions must have been quite familiar to European clergy in the age of Reformation. It thus is a fallacy to assume, as Schurhammer does in many places, that opposition and criticism automatically signify that there was a consciousness of another “religion” rather than just a rival sect.

APP: FRANCIS XAVIER'S DISCOVERY (3)

make money from the believers. They make the people believe that if they give to the priests much money in this life, the priests will give it back to them in the other; thus the people give donations only to the priests who are rich, in order to provide them with the funds to pay them back after death in the other world. They also let them know that whoever takes a piece of paper [çedula] by the priests from this world to the other world will be proceed unharmed by the demons. And these pieces of paper cost a lot of money, and most secular people buy them before they die.⁵⁵

These “pieces of paper” refer to religious documents called *kirigami* or *kechimyaku* which are also mentioned several times by Mendez Pinto⁵⁶ and played an important and interesting role in the expansion of Sōtō-Zen and its funeral rituals in Japan.⁵⁷ Of course, the idea of a clergy taking money with the promise of ameliorating the fate of a person after death was all too familiar to the missionaries: the rampant sale of indulgences by Christian clergy was after all an extremely successful as well as controversial enterprise of the Catholic church. What the missionaries found reprehensible here was that the Buddhist clergy would claim to have *any* influence *at all* in the afterlife. The afterlife was controlled by the Christian God alone; thus it was a preposterous lie to claim that a clergy other than the Christian one would have any influence in the “other world.” If Christian priests were the only ones who could open the door to Paradise through baptism, they also had the monopoly of goods and services in the netherworld.

Torres notes that though the priests of the Japanese sects are highly respected by the populace—in part because of their claim not to “eat anything that has blood”—they do just that on the sly and indulge in

⁵⁵ Torres, first Yamaguchi letter; Schurhammer 1929, p. 50 (original p. 95). See the slightly shorter similar passage in the second Yamaguchi letter by Torres (*Cartas* 1598, p. 17v; Schurhammer 1929, p. 59).

⁵⁶ Mendes Pinto calls them “cuchimiocós,” “cuchimiacós” or “cochumiacos.” See Fernão Mendes Pinto, *The Travels of Mendes Pinto*, tr. by Rebecca Catz, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 243, 476, and 485. See also Schurhammer 1982, vol. 4, p. 443.

⁵⁷ See for example William M. Bodiford, *Sōtō Zen in Medieval Japan*, Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1993.

“many other evil things in secret or in public.” Such attacks on the clergy were designed to appeal to a public with a fine sense of morals:

They are people who are very edified by the good and even more irritated by evil—and it is for this reason that they are disgusted by the priests of this land because of their evil habits.⁵⁸

But the clergy’s moral decadence is only a symptom of a far more compelling reason for their powerlessness in the other world, namely, the supreme blasphemy of the founders of these idolatrous creeds. Amida and Shaka had dared to violate God’s first commandment, just as Lucifer once did, with terrible results that still haunt mankind:

When one uses reason to convey to them that those whom they revere as Saints could not save themselves and therefore could even less save the souls of others, that they are in hell because they portrayed themselves as God and as able to save souls, and, since they fail to find out who the Holy One [el Santo]⁵⁹ really is that they ought to worship, that those who they worship will go to hell, and that the things the priests do against reason are false and untruthful—at that very hour these priests and laymen admit defeat and say that we are right.⁶⁰

In the third Torres letter which, instead of edifying potential mission-

⁵⁸ Torres, first Yamaguchi letter; Schurhammer 1929, p. 52 (original p. 97).

⁵⁹ As Schurhammer (1929, p. 51) suggests, the Japanese word used in this discussion probably was *hotoke* 仏, i.e., “Buddha.” Thus the argument would get a slightly different twist since the question is not *which God* ought to be worshiped but rather *which Buddha*.

⁶⁰ Torres, first Yamaguchi letter; Schurhammer 1929, p. 51 (original p. 96). The second letter (Schurhammer 1929, p. 60) contains a similar instant conversion story: this time, the Japanese who “are guided by reason” are totally convinced that only the one who has created their souls can save them, and that the souls have a beginning but no end. Hearing this, they immediately “abandon their idols, which they worshiped from childhood, and their fathers and mothers too, and become Christians.” That the conversions were not so easy is indicated by the fact that a little later in the same letter Torres mentions the inquiry about the souls with a beginning and no end as one of the “extremely difficult questions” (Schurhammer 1929, p. 52, original pp. 96–97).

aries, informs Xavier of the latest events in Yamaguchi, some glimpses of a more sober reality peek out of the missionary's triumphalist tale:

Among [the visitors to Daidōji] there were some shave-pated nobles [fidalgos rapados] who could not be refuted without special assistance by our Lord. Because they are people who engage in great meditations they posed questions which neither St. Thomas [Aquinas] nor [Duns] Scotus could have answered to satisfy people without faith.⁶¹

Luckily, we have a rare alternative account about the Yamaguchi discussions: the notes that interpreter Juan Fernández took in (romanized) Japanese during the disputations at Daidōji in the month after Xavier's departure. Fernández' letter with a Spanish version of these notes reached Xavier in Bungo before the Portuguese ship took him back to India.

The Fernández Letter

To the Yamaguchi missionaries, the teachings of the Japanese sects were only of strategic interest: they had to know some things about them in order to show their inconsistency and basic falsehood, leading to the defeat and conversion of both the clergy and the faithful. The Fernández letter contains a number of questions that the missionaries had developed for specific sects. For the Japanese, these discussions must have been a crash course in Aristotelian and scholastic logic:

“No thing that is not alive can move by itself without a mover. Since sun and moon are not alive, they cannot move by themselves. Who then has moved them and moves them from one side to the other?” They did not know how to answer this.⁶²

The missionaries focused on the question of the creator God, the eternal soul that can choose between good and evil, and on eternal dam-

⁶¹ Torres, third Yamaguchi letter (October 20, 1551 to Francis Xavier); Schurhammer 1929, p. 62 (original *Cartas* 1598, p. 18 v;). The *Cartas* 1575 text is more heavily edited here; see Schurhammer 1929, p. 62, notes 4 and 6.

⁶² Fernández, Yamaguchi letter (October 20, 1551 to Francis Xavier); Schurhammer 1929, p. 74 (original pp. 103–104).

nation in hell for those who make the wrong choice. However, the Japanese discussants seem to have given back in kind, focusing on the almighty and good creator God and his defective products (hell, the devil, people incapable of keeping his commandments). Since our focus here is on information about Buddhism rather than Christianity, we must be grateful that the missionaries made no mention at all of the mysteries of their faith such as the son of God from Nazareth, the Holy Ghost, the Trinity, etc., that could have caused logic to falter, and chose to concentrate instead on some aspects of Buddhism that offended god-given reason.

The discussion notes of Fernández are arranged by sects. By far the most voluminous part consists of discussions with Zen priests and laymen.⁶³ The rest is made up of a some sections on unspecified "other" questioners,⁶⁴ the worshipers of Shaka,⁶⁵ and a small final section on the worshipers of Amida and the Hokke sect.⁶⁶

The questions to the worshipers of Shaka follow a set path: they probe the reasons for the worship of Shaka, eliciting some biographical information that then is attacked for inconsistency:⁶⁷

When we asked why they worshiped him, they replied that Xaquá always was and will be; and from the beginning of the world to the time that he was born of a woman, which is now some 2500 years, he was born 8000 times. We asked them from whom he was born those eight thousand times, and why he was born, and when he was born. They replied that they knew no more than that Xaquá, after he had been born a man, at the age of seven years lifted up a dear hand to heaven and placed the other upon earth and said: "I am alone in heaven and on earth." And after this he preached many lives of former Saints, for example, the life of Amida so that those who worshiped these former Saints might be saved.⁶⁸

⁶³ Schurhammer 1929, pp. 67-80.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-82 (sections 45-46).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83 (sections 47-51).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 83 (section 52).

⁶⁷ Since we are here interested in information about Buddhism, little mention will be made of the usually predictable questions and arguments of the missionaries.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 82 (sections 47-48); original p. 108. English translation from Schurham-

To the missionaries, Shaka thus appeared as a blasphemous reformer who violated the first of the commandments that God had communicated to Moses and also targeted the followers of Amida, a "Saint" who had lived long before him, with his promise of salvation. Shaka, the missionaries were told, had written books so that his followers would pray to him and be saved. However, at age 49, he completely changed his mind:

At the age of forty-nine, he contemplated and said that so far he had been ignorant and therefore had written so many things. But now he stated that one who wished to be saved should learn by self-contemplation what his end would be, and those who did not know this would be condemned, since he had now learned this through contemplations.⁶⁹

These books, the missionaries learned, are nevertheless of some use to those who are unable to perform such meditations and are saved by praying to Shaka and his saints.⁷⁰ Torres immediately jumped on the obvious contradiction:

If that is so, why has Shaka said when he was 49 years old that he did not know anything when he wrote those books, and that only one who meditates can be saved? Thus this was a lie, and if he had been a true saint without beginning or end he could not have lied since in the creator and saviour of the world there cannot be any deceit. And since he lied then, one can see that what he said at age seven about being alone in heaven and on earth also was a lie, and that those who pray to him and do what he taught will not be saved since it was all lies.⁷¹

The representatives of the "religion of Amida and the Hokke-shū" are chided because of their stupid customs:

mer 1982, vol. 4, pp. 289–290. The word Fernández noted for "saint" was probably *hotoke*, i.e., buddha. See the Daidōji permit in part 2 of this article and Schurhammer 1929, p. 66, note 2.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 82 (section 48); original pp. 108–109. Alternative translation in Schurhammer 1982, vol. 4, p. 290.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 82–83 (section 49); original p. 109.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 83 (section 51); original p. 109.

We reproached them especially for the things which they did and their silliness, particularly the *padres* because they had women and laymen present offerings to the wooden idols of Amida, and also because they offered food to the souls of the departed.⁷²

The major part of the discussions with the Zen representatives turned around problems that the missionaries set up in order to drive home major points of their faith: a first principle or Creator God (sections 4–5), an *anima* or eternal soul that distinguishes man from animals (sections 6–12 & 16–26), the nature and location of heaven and hell (sections 13–15), the nature and location of God (sections 21–29), and those of the devil (sections 30–32 & 39–44), the goodness and compassion of God (sections 33–34, 38–41, 45–46), and morality and sexual customs (sections 35–37).

Since many of the questions or answers are set in terms whose meaning the missionaries did not yet realize, the interesting problems we discussed in part 2 in connection with the Daidōji permit are pervasive. The first question of the missionaries to the representatives of Zen may serve as example: “How do you go about becoming a saint [se *fazerem Santos*]?” The expression “*fazer santos*” was also used in the Daidōji document where it appears to stand for *buppō*, the teaching of the Buddha,⁷³ and Schurhammer notes that in Japanese Fernández here probably asked about the way to become a *hotoke* or Buddha. In the answer to this and to other questions, the Zen representatives essentially press their point that to look for saints or buddhas outside is useless, and that no way will lead to that which is neither this nor that, neither lives nor dies, and is thus often called “nothing.” The answer to the first question goes:

They laughed and replied that there are no saints; thus there

⁷² Ibid., p. 83 (section 52); original p. 109. See also Torres’ remarks in the same letter on the Bon-festival (p. 80; original p. 107):

As your Reverence knows, they have many ceremonies in this regard. They say that souls come here every seven days to eat, and they prepare very good food for them, and in August they put, for 15 days in a row and with much festivities, food on the graves while saying that they come.

⁷³ See part 2 of this article.

APP: FRANCIS XAVIER'S DISCOVERY (3)

was no need to look for one's way; since what had come into existence from nothing could not help returning to nothing [que de nada foi echo, não puede deixar de se converter em nadie].⁷⁴

Concerning the "first principle" from which all things arise, they said:

This is a principle from which all things arise: men, animals, plants: every created thing has in itself this principle, and when a man or animal dies, they return to the four elements, into that which they were, and this principle returns to that which it is. This principle, they say, is neither good nor bad, has neither glory nor pain, does not die and does not live, so that it is a no [de manera que es hum nó].⁷⁵

The Jesuits tried to turn this principle into a springboard towards the admission of an eternal soul (sections 6–13), ending up with the soul's choice of heaven or hell. However, the Japanese told them that hell and the punishment of evil are not in the yonder but rather right here:

They replied that there is no hell after a man's death and that hell is in this world. And when through death we are liberated from these physical miseries by leaving this hell, we shall be at peace.⁷⁶

A topic of the Jesuits around which much of their argument turned, the eternal soul, shows how these discussions often ran on parallel tracks. Using an image familiar to Buddhists, that of a jewel buried in dirt, the missionaries argued that as long as the soul is "confined in this dirty body" it cannot see *hotoke* (God). To their surprise, the Japanese agreed, and how:

They said that this is so, and that the souls of men are God because they do not have any body and therefore are neither born nor die.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Fernández, Yamaguchi letter (section 4); Schurhammer 1929, pp. 66–67 (original p. 99).

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 67 (section 5); original p. 99.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 69–70 (section 15); original p. 101.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 72 (sections 24–25); original p. 103.

The agreement and the following reasoning remain puzzling until one translates the statement back into Japanese: the *kokoro*, the soul of man, is nothing other than *hotoke*, Buddha, because it does not have any form and therefore is neither born nor dies. Or, to put it into Zen words: Mind is Buddha, and Buddha is Mind. For the Jesuits, the statement "the souls of men are God" was of course unacceptable—after all, there are bad guys—which is why they replied:

We replied to this by asking them if among men there were those who were good and those who were evil. They replied that there were. We said: "The Saint" (*hotoke*) who created the world and such beautiful things and rules over them never thought nor did anything bad; he is most holy and totally good. Thus it is clear that the souls of evil people are not God but rather creatures of God.⁷⁸

As this is the end of this particular discussion, one can imagine the puzzled look on the Japanese faces . . . However, if one considers that these totally different spiritual universes were discussed through an interpreter with barely two years of Japanese, no dictionaries, hardly any knowledge of Buddhism, and a set of Buddhist terms that carried different meanings for each side, the amount of information that actually came through is surprising. What came through best were a series of sharp questions from the Japanese concerning various facets of theodicy—questions which produced embarrassingly dull answers that, for better or worse, cannot concern us here. They indicate that the Yamaguchi discussions may have failed to convey even the First Commandment as formulated by Fernández:

Therefore the First Commandment: Every man who has intelligence and uses it, will immediately know that there is a Creator who created his soul.⁷⁹

The Cochin and Goa Letters

After his return to India, Xavier informed the European Jesuits in detail about the idolatries of Japan. In addition to his own memory, he

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 72 (section 25); original p. 103.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 81 (section 45); original p. 108.

was relying on the new information obtained just before his departure from Japan through the letters of Cosme de Torres and Juan Fernández. Three letters of Xavier from Cochin—the long letter to the Jesuits in Europe⁸⁰ and the shorter ones to Ignatius of Loyola⁸¹ and Simão Rodriguez⁸²—summarize the knowledge Xavier had gained about Buddhism.

Xavier was immensely surprised and impressed by the great number of professional clerics and monastic institutions in Japan:

There are in the land a great number of men and women who make a profession of religion. [. . .] There are a very great number of these men and women bonzes in Japan: it is something that has to be seen before it can be believed. Persons of great veracity have told me that there is a duke in Japan whose lands contain eight hundred monasteries of friars and nuns, and that each of these has no less than thirty individuals; and that in addition to these eight hundred monasteries, there are others of four, six, and eight persons. From what I have seen of Japan, I believe this to be so.⁸³

Xavier distinguished “nine kinds of doctrine, each one different from the others.”⁸⁴ He fails to mention any of them by name, but we may assume on the basis of the above-mentioned information by Torres that he means the Tendai, Shingon, Jōdo, Jōdo-shin (Ikkō), Hokke (Nichiren), Ji, Rinzai-Zen, Sōtō-Zen, and probably the Yūzū-nembutsu sects.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Schurhammer & Wicki, 1944/45, letter no. 96, from Cochin to the Jesuit companions in Europe, January 29, 1552; Costelloe 1992, pp. 326–343.

⁸¹ Schurhammer & Wicki, 1944/45, letter no. 97, from Cochin to Ignatius of Loyola in Rome, January 29, 1552; Costelloe 1992, pp. 344–348.

⁸² Schurhammer & Wicki, 1944/45, letter no. 98 to Father Simão Rodrigues in Portugal, written in Cochin on January 30, 1552; Costelloe 1992, pp. 349–351.

⁸³ Schurhammer & Wicki, 1944/45, letter no. 96, from Cochin to the Jesuit companions in Europe, January 29, 1552; Costelloe 1992, pp. 327–328.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 328.

⁸⁵ The Yūzū nembutsu sect 融通念佛宗 was founded by Ryōnin 良忍 (1071–1132). Yūzū means “permeating,” referring to the all-pervading faith in Amitābha-Buddha. In Japan, one usually speaks of thirteen major Buddhist sects; in addition to those mentioned, they include the so-called Nara-sects (Kegon 華嚴, Hossō 法相, and Ritsu 律) as well as a third flavor of Zen imported later from China, the Ōbaku 黄檗 sect.

The teachings of all of these sects are, according to Xavier, believed to come "from a mainland near Japan by the name of China."⁸⁶ Their objects of worship are men rather than gods, and the most important are called "Xaca" and "Amida:"

They have writings of men who performed great penances, that is, for a thousand, two thousand, and three thousand years, whose names are Shaka and Amida. They also have many others, but the most important of these are Shaka and Amida.⁸⁷

Xavier guessed that the color of the clergy's dress indicates which of these two men they worshiped:

The male and female bonzes who wear grey habits are all attached to Amida, and the majority of the people of Japan worship Amida. Many of the male and female bonzes who wear black habits, though they worship Amida, have Shaka as their main object of worship, and many others.⁸⁸

Since Amida and Xaca appeared to be the main objects of worship, Xavier attempted to gather information about them. But in spite of the help of those informants in Yamaguchi who gave him "a very faithful account of all that is contained in the laws of the pagans,"⁸⁹ what he learned was rather predictable:

I tried to learn if these two, Amida and Shaka, had been men dedicated to philosophy. I asked the Christians to make an accurate translation of their lives. I discovered from what was written in their books that they were not men, since it was written that they had lived for a thousand and two thousand years, and that Shaka will be born eight thousand times, and

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 328.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 328.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 337. Xavier's confusion as to who worships whom is not only due to the fact that, unlike in Europe, Japanese monks and nuns sometimes wear robes of different colors for different functions (grand ceremonies, funerals, etc.) and ranks, but also to his hazy picture of the relationship of Shaka, Amida, and those "many other" bud-dhas, bodhisattvas, eminent monks, and founders of sects.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 333.

APP: FRANCIS XAVIER'S DISCOVERY (3)

many other absurdities. They were thus not men, but pure inventions of the demons.⁹⁰

The original master plan to defeat the teachings of these “pure inventions of the demons” at the great universities of Japan did not advance beyond the impression that the Ashikaga-gakkō in Bandō may be important:

In this land of Japan there is a very great university by the name of Bandu, where a great many bonzes go to study the teachings of their sects. These sects, as I have already said, come from China, and their writings are written in Chinese letters, even though the writing of Japan is much different from that of China.⁹¹

So, after more than two years in Japan and in spite of that very learned graduate of Bandō in Yamaguchi who became a “Christian,” Xavier could hardly report anything new about the primary targets of his overall missionary strategy beyond what he had known at the outset:

Bonzes from almost all of Japan go to study in Bandu; and, when they return from Bandu, they teach in their own lands what they have learned there. From what I have been told, Bandu is a very large city inhabited by many noblemen. The people are reputed to be very hardy, though there are said to be some good men among them. This is the information which I have obtained about Bandu, and the same would be true about the other universities.⁹²

But what did he find out about the *teachings* of these sects? As is to be expected, the missionary focused on the topics of strategic importance for his enterprise:

In the teachings of their sects, the Japanese have no knowledge [. . .] about the creation of the world, the sun, moon, stars, heaven, earth, sea, or anything else. It seems to them that the world has had no beginning. What they felt the most

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 337.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 340.

⁹² Ibid., pp. 349–350.

was to hear us say that souls have a Creator who created them. Almost all were astonished by this.⁹³

With regard to sectarian consciousness, Xavier noted a strange mixture of nonchalance and fanatic fervor in people's attitudes:

Both men and women, each one according to his or her own wish, choose the doctrine which he or she desires, and no one is forced to belong to one sect rather than to another. The consequence of this is that there are homes where the husband belongs to one sect, the wife to another, and the sons to still another; but this does not seem to be strange to them, since each one chooses what he or she wishes. There are differences and quarrels among them, since they deem some to be better than others; and there are wars because of this.⁹⁴

However, on some most important points, all the sects appeared to be in agreement:

None of these nine sects say anything about the creation of the world or of souls. All say that there is hell⁹⁵ and paradise; but no one explains what paradise is, and even less by whose order and command souls go to hell. These sects simply maintain that the men who founded them performed great

⁹³ Ibid., pp. 333-334.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 328.

⁹⁵ In fact, Xavier contradicts this statement in the same letter (p. 335). Though he does not mention the sect by name, it is clear that he here condemns the Zen sect for not believing in one of his religion's central features:

Among the nine sects there is one which holds that the souls of men are mortal, exactly like those of animals. All the others, those who are not of this law, think this is a very wicked sect. The members of this sect are evil; they have no patience to hear it said that there is a hell.

However, possibly without realizing that he speaks of the same sect, he also wrote in the same letter (p. 340):

These bonzes have great and very subtle talents. They spend much of their time in contemplating, in thinking about what will happen to them and the goal which they must reach, and other contemplations of this sort.

APP: FRANCIS XAVIER'S DISCOVERY (3)

penances, that is, for a thousand, two thousand, and three thousand years; and that they performed these penances because they were concerned about the perdition of many people who did not do penance for their sins.⁹⁶

For Xavier, the main feature of the teaching of Japanese sects consisted in the possibility of getting saved simply by prayers to the founders of the sects without doing penance or holding the commandments.⁹⁷ These commandments are very numerous—"three hundred and five hundred commandments, and others besides"—yet all sects agree that only five are necessary: not killing or eating anything that has been killed; not stealing; not fornicating; not lying; and not drinking wine.⁹⁸ However, realizing that ordinary people are too weak even to observe these five commandments, the clergy offered the public a deal: if you give us money, food, and housing, we keep the commandments in your place, and you can sin as you like.

And this is why both the grandees and the people, in order to be free to sin, granted the male and female bonzes what they asked; and these priests and nuns of theirs are consequently held in very high esteem in Japan. The people themselves are fully convinced that these bonzes and nuns have the power to save souls that are going to hell, since they have bound themselves to keep the commandments and to recite other prayers in their stead.⁹⁹

As a matter of fact, this "power to save souls that are going to hell"¹⁰⁰ became the real bone of contention. Xavier realized this, stating: "All the quarrels that we had with the bonzes were over this question of hell."¹⁰¹ Thus he warned future missionaries:

Many [bonzes] will become furious when they hear this about

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 328.

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 328-329.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 329.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 329.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 329.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 336.

hell, that there is no remedy for it. Others will say that we know nothing, since we cannot rescue souls from hell. They have no knowledge of purgatory.¹⁰²

Apart from excluding the poor and the women, who have “more sins than those of all the men in the world because of purgation,”¹⁰³ the deal offered by Japanese clergy—which included various means of making money such as taking money in this world and promising to pay it back tenfold in the beyond¹⁰⁴—was of course rotten at the very core:

We, however, proved to them that those who go to hell cannot be rescued by the male and female bonzes, giving them reasons that made it seem to them that it was as we said, telling them that they had up till then been deceived by the bonzes. It pleased God in his mercy that even the bonzes said that it was true that they could not release the souls of those who had gone to hell, but that if they did not preach this, they would not have anything to eat or to wear.¹⁰⁵

This struggle over who can really save souls from hell reminds one vividly of the heated discussions that took place in Europe during the Reformation, where the very same issues were of central importance. There as in Japan, the established clergy was attacked by reformers who claimed that the promises of help in the afterworld were just scams for making money. However, in Japan the roles were reversed: the European shock troops of Counter-Reformation, the Jesuits, were unwittingly carrying the mantle of Buddhist reformers. Just as Luther had taught disenchanted Catholics that the true Christian hell had no waiting room or purgatory, the Jesuits now taught the Japanese that their view that “even though they were in hell, they would be released from it if they were summoned by the founders of their sects”¹⁰⁶ was a

¹⁰² Schurhammer & Wicki, 1944/45, letter no. 97, from Cochin to Ignatius of Loyola in Rome, January 29, 1552; Costelloe 1992, p. 346.

¹⁰³ Schurhammer & Wicki, 1944/45, letter no. 96, from Cochin to the Jesuit companions in Europe, January 29, 1552; Costelloe 1992, p. 329.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 330.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 336.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

APP: FRANCIS XAVIER'S DISCOVERY (3)

lie because the founder of the true teaching did not let anyone out of hell:

The Christians of Japan are afflicted with sadness, and the reason for this is that they feel keenly what we have told them, that there is no remedy for those who go to hell. They feel this because of their love for their fathers and mothers, wives, children, and others who have died in the past and they feel pity for them. Many weep for their dead, and they ask me if there is any remedy for them through alms and prayers. I tell them that there is no remedy for them.¹⁰⁷

For people accustomed to compassionate figures such as the bodhisattva Jizō who does not shy away from stepping right into hell in order to rescue the damned and lead them to the Western Paradise, the Christian *Deus*, the creator of all mankind, seemed coldhearted:

Before their baptism, these people of Yamaguchi had great doubts about the supreme goodness of God, saying that he could not be merciful, since he had not revealed himself to them before our coming; if it was true (as we said) that those who did not adore God all go to hell, God had had no mercy on their ancestors, since he had let them go to hell without having given them a knowledge of himself.¹⁰⁸

Of course, the fate of their ancestors was and is of great concern to the Japanese, and Buddhism provided the ways and means to deal with this problem. The teaching about hell by the monks from *Tenjiku* was thus a terrible shock to the Japanese audience. However, Xavier also saw a good side in all their pain:

They feel this sadness; but I am not disturbed by this, only that they do not become careless about themselves and go to suffer with their ancestors. They ask me if God can rescue them from hell, and the reason why they must ever remain in hell. I give them extensive answers to all this. They do not cease to weep when they see that their ancestors cannot be

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 341.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 335.

helped. And I also experience some sadness when I see my friends, so loved and cherished, weeping over things for which there is no remedy.¹⁰⁹

Apart from such sadness, Xavier derived even more joy in Japan than he had felt in India and Indonesia:

I can truthfully say that I had never before in my life received so much pleasure and spiritual consolation as I did in seeing that God our Lord confounded the pagans through us and the victory which we were constantly gaining over them.¹¹⁰

Just as communist news programs used to report the “victory of communism” along with targets such as getting a refrigerator into every private home by the year 2000, Xavier’s declaration of “constant victory” came with an order for people who could actually bring it about: men “well trained in the *artes* and *sofisteria*” who could “through their disputations defeat the bonzes” and “catch them when they contradict themselves.” For this purpose, Xavier devised a two-pronged strategy: one group, stationed in Japan had to acquire “a very good knowledge of the [Japanese] language” in order to “master the errors of the sects.” They could then serve a second group, the “reliable people from Europe,” in defeating the bonzes.¹¹¹ It was all too clear to Xavier that during his two-year stay in Japan, the effort to “master the errors of the sects” had hardly begun. The one missionary who could speak intelligible Japanese, Juan Fernández, was unable to read any texts of these sects; and, having burnt his fingers badly with Anjirō, Xavier knew well what risk reliance on Japanese informants entailed.

Reflecting on his efforts in Japan, Xavier admitted to his superior that they were far from perfect:

I would never be able to describe the great debt that I owe to the people of Japan, since God our Lord, through respect for them, gave me a great knowledge of my infinite iniquities; for, being apart from myself, I did not recognize the many

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 341.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 343.

¹¹¹ Schurhammer & Wicki, 1944/45, letter no. 98, from Cochin to Simão Rodriguez in Portugal, January 30, 1552; Costelloe 1992, p. 349.

APP: FRANCIS XAVIER'S DISCOVERY (3)

evils that were within me until I saw myself amidst the toils and dangers of Japan. God our Lord made me clearly feel the great need which I had of one who would take great care of me.¹¹²

But Xavier had once again left the consequences of his iniquities to others while setting a new goal for himself: China! Trying to calm his pangs of conscience, he asserted that his leaving of Japan would actually benefit the troubled Japan mission rather than harm it, "for, if the Japanese learn that the Chinese have accepted the law of God, they will more quickly lose their faith in their sects."¹¹³ This idea had been formed on the basis of repeated Japanese doubts about the legitimacy of Christian doctrines because they were not known in China:

It seemed to them that there could not be a Creator of all things, since this Creator is never mentioned in the teachings of their saints; and, even more, if all things in the world had a beginning, the people of China, from whom they had received their own laws, would have known this.¹¹⁴

However set the case that the Japanese had realized that the creed of Xavier is a religion from Europe and entirely different from Buddhism, why would then the presence of this teaching in China be an issue at all? Had the Great Enemy again played a trick on the pious Spaniard, conjuring up another *fata morgana* that enticed the missionary to a faraway land?

¹¹² Schurhammer & Wicki, 1944/45, letter no. 97, from Cochin to Ignatius of Loyola in Rome, January 29, 1552; Costelloe 1992, p. 347.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 347.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 333-334.