

## FFWPU Europe and Middle East: Japan's Horrific Inquisition Against Christians

Knut Holdhus  
January 9, 2025



*Persecution of the Christians in Japan. When the Spaniards and Portuguese arrived in Japan, they introduced more than just firearms and scientific knowledge - they brought Christianity. The missionaries succeeded in converting tens of thousands to the Catholic Church. However, this new religious influence was not welcomed by all. By the late 16th century, Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536 - 1598), Japan's de facto ruler, began issuing decrees against Christians in an effort to curtail their growing influence. As a result, priests and Japanese Christians were persecuted, killed, or exiled. Ultimately, Christianity was banned in Japan, forcing the few remaining adherents to practice their faith in complete secrecy*



**Similarities to treatment of Family Federation today: Japan's horrible persecution of Christians during religious inquisition**

Tokyo, 4th January 2025 - Published as an article in the Japanese newspaper [Sekai Nippo](#). Republished with permission. Translated from Japanese. [Original article](#).

The Persecution of Christians and the First Religious Inquisition Officer: Masashige Inoue

Driving Believers to Apostasy Rather than Martyrdom - A Guidebook for Forced Apostasy Left Behind

by the editorial department of [Sekai Nippo](#)

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Masashige Inoue (1585-1661 - 井上政重), also known as Governor of Chikugo, was a hatamoto - a direct retainer of the Tokugawa shogunate (1603-1868) - in the early Edo period who later became a daimyo - a powerful feudal lord. Though not widely recognized in Japanese history, he served as the first Shūmon Aratameyaku (Religious Inquisition Officer), wielding great power in the persecution of Christians. In a quiet residential area of Kohinata, Bunkyo Ward, Tokyo, there is a stone marker commemorating the site known as the "Christian Residence Ruins", which was the location of Inoue's lower residence and a detention center for apostate missionaries - missionaries who renounced their faith.





*Japanese feudal lord from early Edo period. The image may resemble Masashige Inoue, a powerful feudal lord who rose to prominence as lover of the Shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu. Inoue was one of the most prominent homosexuals in modern Japanese history*

Inoue's methods for forcing apostasy (renunciation of belief) and conversion were exceptionally harsh. One infamous technique was the ana-zuri ("pit hanging") punishment, where believers were suspended upside down into a pit. Care was taken to prolong their lives and suffering to coerce recantation (statement that one no longer holds a belief) before death. At the same time, Inoue also employed more conciliatory measures, such as offering comforting words and even arranging female companionship, blending harshness with persuasion to achieve forced apostasy. This brutal yet cunning approach led American historian George Elison to compare Inoue to Adolf Eichmann, describing him as an "intellectual and demonic operator".

Inoue played a significant role during the Shimabara Rebellion (1637-1638) as an advisor to Matsudaira Nobutsuna (松平信綱) - nicknamed "Izu the Wise" - the shogunate's senior envoy, and was instrumental in post-rebellion governance. This pivotal involvement positioned him as the highest authority in Christian persecution as the first Shūmon Aratameyaku (Religious Inquisition Officer).

However, Inoue's actions went beyond mere crackdowns.

Traveling between Nagasaki and Edo, he reported to the shogun and senior officials to ensure the thorough enforcement of anti-Christian policies. Simultaneously, he actively sought overseas intelligence through Dutch factory chiefs, the sole foreign traders permitted in Japan at the time. In this sense, he was not merely an isolationist but held a crucial role in the shogunate's foreign policy.



*Storming by Shogunate forces of the rebel stronghold, Hara Castle during the Shimabara rebellion*

At the time, European powers such as Spain and Portugal were expanding into Asia. The Tokugawa shogunate was undeniably concerned about the prospect of colonization under the guise of missionary activity, even as trade and commerce flourished with these nations.

The system of the Shūmon Aratame (Religious Inquisition) and its legacy until the lifting of the Christian ban in 6th year of Meiji (1873)

The Shūmon Aratame (Religious Inquisition) system continued until the prohibition on Christianity was officially lifted in the 6th year of Meiji (1873). Until that time, the manual for forced apostasy and conversion authored by Masashige Inoue, titled *Kirisuto-ki* ("The Christ Chronicle"), served as a guidebook for successive Shūmon Aratameyaku (Religious Inquisition Officers). For instance, it instructed interrogators to pose pointed questions to Christians, such as:

"If God created heaven and earth, why does His power not extend over everything?"

"How can it be consistent to create a world in which humans fall into evil and then promote a teaching to save those very

humans?"

As German priest Hubert J. Cieslik (1914-1998) noted in *Japanese Priests During the Christian Era*:

"The approach of Inoue, Governor of Chikugo, could be summarized in one sentence: Create apostates, not martyrs. To achieve this, he made every effort to 'brainwash' and persuade them."

The interrogation of Giovanni Sidotti by Arai Hakuseki

The *Seiyō Kibun* (Record of Things Heard from the West) by Arai Hakuseki (新井白石 - 1657-1725), a Confucianist scholar, documents his interrogation of Giovanni Battista Sidotti (1668-1714), a missionary who infiltrated Japan. Sidotti ultimately did not convert and spent the rest of his life confined to the Christian Residence. During the interrogation, Hakuseki noted that Sidotti gave the impression of being both a "sage" and a "fool". The "sage" aspect lay in Sidotti's extensive knowledge of the humanities and global affairs, while the "fool" aspect was his insistence on clandestinely bringing Christianity to Japan.



*The Japanese scholar Arai Hakuseki (1657-1725)  
These tactics aimed to undermine Christian  
doctrines and worldview, compelling believers to  
renounce their faith.*

According to the writer Shichihei Yamamoto (山本七平 - 1921-1991), Hakuseki's issue with Christianity stemmed from its opposition to the Japanese hierarchical group-oriented order based on Confucianism. Yamamoto argued:

"If Christianity were accepted, all societal order would collapse. Since the Meiji era (1868-1912) - or perhaps since Hakuseki's time (1657-1725) - we have focused solely on the 'wise' aspects of Christianity, dismissing what we perceived as its 'foolish' elements. This isolationist philosophy continues to bind Japan even today." (Study of "Air" - 「空気」の研究)

Editorial Advisor: Masahiro Kuroki

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# Cutting Of Ties Is How Christians Were Treated

• July 4, 2024 • Knut Holdhus



*Pointed out by Tokyo Paper: The Kishida administration's cutting of ties with minority faith evokes painful memories of horrible persecution of Christians*

Tokyo, 2nd July 2024 – Published as the **second article** in a series in the Japanese newspaper *Sekai Nippo*.  
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by the Religious Freedom Investigative Team of the editorial department of *Sekai Nippo*



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
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On 31<sup>st</sup> August 2022, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, who had returned to official duties after being infected with the new coronavirus, held a press conference at the *Prime Minister's Office* and declared, in his capacity as President of the *Liberal Democratic Party*, a severance of ties with the **Family Federation**.



Toshimitsu Motegi in May 2023. Photo: U.S. Department of State / Wikimedia Commons. Public domain image. Cropped

**The Prime Minister announced that he had instructed** Secretary-General Toshimitsu Motegi to ensure that party members 'sincerely reflect on the past and **sever ties** with the **organization**, making this the party's fundamental policy.'

At that time, did Prime Minister Kishida truly understand the serious implications of a political party that champions freedom and democracy declaring that it would sever ties with a specific **religious organization**? In democratic Japan, **politicians are free to have a relationship to religious organizations**. The exception is when the organization is an anti-social force, in which case having contact itself is problematic. However, in the case of the **Family Federation**, Kishida's declaration of cutting of ties was based on the vague

reasoning that it is a "socially problematic organization".

The **National Network of Lawyers Against Spiritual Sales (Zenkoku Benren)** and the **Communist Party (JCP)** have long asserted that the **Family Federation is an anti-social organization** and that for a member of the Diet to have a relationship with it gives the **organization** "legitimacy" and serves as "advertising". Prime Minister Kishida has completely aligned himself with this view.

In 1987, on 10<sup>th</sup> July, during a session in the *Japanese National Diet*, a *Communist Party* senator asked Prime Minister at the time Yasuhiro Nakasone (中曽根康弘) about the *Federation for Victory over Communism* (勝共連合), an organization associated with the **Family Federation** (then known as "**Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity**" = the **Unification Church**), which was causing controversy due to the "spiritual sales" issue. The senator inquired, "As Prime Minister and leader of the Liberal Democratic Party, will you clearly state that you will sever ties with the *Federation for Victory Over Communism*?" Nakasone responded as follows,



Yasuhiro Nakasone (1918-2019), Japanese Prime Minister 1982-1987. Photo: 首相官邸ホームページ / Wikimedia Commons. License: CC Attr 4.0 Int

"Regarding what the Liberal Democratic Party says about severing ties with certain organizations, I consider it a **serious violation of freedom of thought and action**. [...] I think this is a **manifestation of the Communist Party's dictatorial policy**."

Nakasone understood that declaring, as the party's president, the severance of ties with a particular organization would be a **serious violation of the "freedom of thought and action"** of the organization

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and individual *Liberal Democratic Party* members.

In accordance with Prime Minister Kishida's instructions, Secretary-General Toshimitsu Motegi (茂木敏充) sent an eight-item questionnaire titled "Regarding Relationships with the Former **Unification Church** and Related Organizations" to all 379 affiliated Diet members [in both houses] and requested their response. The content included actions that are not problematic for politicians, such as "attending meetings hosted by the Former **Unification Church**" and "receiving volunteer support during elections".

The *Liberal Democratic Party* has started to **scrutinize even actions like "sending congratulatory telegrams or messages to meetings", akin to the religious persecution of Christians** during the era of religious inquisitions.

On 8<sup>th</sup> September 2022, the *Liberal Democratic Party* announced the results of its investigation and declared a policy to thoroughly incorporate into its governance code the severance of ties with the **religious organization**. This method is **exactly the same as the "self-criticism" and "obedience to party discipline" demanded by the mainstream faction of the Communist Party** when forcing the non-mainstream factions to submit during a policy shift.

As a national political party, the *Liberal Democratic Party* (LDP) has been backed by members and supporters from a wide variety of religious and ideological backgrounds. The diversity of those backgrounds has been one of the sources of the party's vigour. **Indiscriminately excluding a single religious organization is tantamount to a suicidal act** for a party that advocates freedom and democracy.

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**Featured image** above: This print shows Fumi-e (踏み絵 fumi "stepping-on" + e "picture"); step on a picture with the likeness of e.g. the Cross of Jesus or the Virgin Mary. This method was used to discover practicing Christians (Kirishitan) of the Catholic Church and sympathizers, which was banned by the Tokugawa Shogunate at that time. Originally, the method of discovery itself was called efumi (絵踏), but the method itself is often called fumi-e.

People who protested or were reluctant to step upon pictures of the Virgin Mary or Christ were identified as Christian. They were taken to Nagasaki and ordered to renounce their religion, if they refused they were tortured. If they kept refusing then they were executed including by burning at the stake. The systematic persecution began in 1614 and carried out by regional governments. By the mid 17th century, the Shogunate demanded the expulsion of all European missionaries and the execution of all converts. The prosecution lasted for over 2 centuries. (Wikimedia Commons) Photo: Unknown author. **Public domain** image. Cropped

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