

LETTER TO THE JESUITS IN GOA

Francis Xavier (1506-1562)

1551

Last year, dearest brethren, I wrote to you from Cagoxima concerning our voyage, our arrival in Japan, and what had been done in the interests of Christianity up to that time. Now I will relate what God had done by our means since last year. On our arrival at the native place of our good Paul, we were received very kindly indeed by his relations and friends. They all of them became Christians, being led by what Paul told them; and that they might be thoroughly confirmed in the truth of our religion, we remained in that place a whole year and more. In that time more than a hundred were gathered into the fold of Christ. The rest might have done so if they had been willing, without giving any offence to their kinsfolk or relations. But the bonzes admonished the prince (who is very powerful, the lord of several towns), that if he allowed his people to embrace the Christian religion, his whole dominion would be destroyed, and the ancestral gods of the country, which they call pagodas, would come to be despised by the natives. For the law of God was contrary to the law of Japan, and it would therefore result that any who embraced that law would repudiate the holy founders of the ancient law of their forefathers, which could not be done without great ruin to the town and realm. Let him look, therefore, with reverence on those most holy men who had been the legislators of Japan, and, considering that the law of God was opposed and hostile to the law of his fathers, let him issue an edict forbidding, under penalty of death, that any one in future should become a Christian. The prince was moved by this discourse of the bonzes, and issued the edict as they had requested.

The interval after this was spent in instructing our converts, in learning Japanese, and in translating into that tongue the chief heads of the Christian faith. We used to dwell shortly on the history of the creation of the world, as seemed useful for the men we had to deal with, as, for instance, that God was the Maker and Creator of the universe, a truth which they were entirely ignorant of, and the other truths necessary for salvation, but principally the truth that God had taken on Himself the nature of man. On this account we translated diligently all the great mysteries of the life of Christ until His Ascension into heaven, and also the account of the last Judgment. We have now translated this book, for such it was, into Japanese with great labor, and have written it in our own characters. Out of this we read what I have mentioned to those who came to the faith of Christ, that the converts might know how to worship God and Jesus Christ with piety and to their souls' health. And when we went on to expound these things in our discourses, the Christians delighted in them very much, as seeing how true the things were which we had taught them. The Japanese are certainly of remarkably good dispositions, and follow reason wonderfully. They see clearly that their ancestral law is false and the law of God true, but they are deterred by fear of their prince from submitting to the Christian religion.

When the year came to an end, seeing the lord of the town to be opposed to all extension of our religion, we determined to pass to another place. We therefore bade farewell to our converts; they loved us so much that they shed many tears, and giving us great thanks for having shown them the way of eternal salvation at the cost of so much labour of our own, were very sorrowful at our departure. We left with them Paul, their own townsman, who is an excellent Christian, to finish their instruction in the precepts of religion. We then went to another town, where the lord of the place received us very kindly; there we remained a few days, and made about a hundred Christians. None of us knew Japanese; nevertheless, by reading the semi-Japanese volume mentioned, and talking to the people, we brought many of them to the worship of Christ.

I charged Cosmo Torres with the care of these converts, and went on with Joam Fernandez to Yamaguchi, the seat of a very wealthy daimyo, as he is thought among the Japanese. The city contains more than ten thousand households; all the houses are of wood. We found many here, both of the common people and of the nobility, very desirous to become acquainted with the Christian law. We thought it best to preach twice a day in the streets and cross roads, reading out parts of our book, and then speaking to the people about the Christian

religion. Some of the noblemen also invited us to their houses, that they might hear about our religion with more convenience. They promised of their own accord, that if they came to think it better than their own, they would unhesitatingly embrace it. Many of them heard what we had to say about the law of God very willingly; some, on the other hand, were angry at it, and even went so far as to laugh at what we said. So, wherever we went through the streets of the city, we were followed by a small crowd of boys of the lowest dregs of the populace, laughing at us and mocking us with some such words as these: "There go the men who tell us that we must embrace the law of God in order to be saved, because we cannot be rescued from destruction except by the Maker of all things and by His Son! There go the men who declare that it is wicked to have more than one wife!" In the same way they made a joke and play of the other articles of our religion.

We had spent some days in this office of preaching, when the king, who was then in the city, sent for us and we went to him. He asked us wherever did we come from? why had we come to Japan? And we answered that we were Europeans sent thither for the sake of preaching the law of God, since no one could be safe and secure unless he purely and piously worship God and His Son Jesus Christ, the Redeemer and Saviour of all nations. Then the king commanded us to explain to him the law of God. So we read to him a good part of our volume; and although we went on reading for an hour or more, he listened to us diligently and attentively as long as we were reading, and then he sent us away. We remained many days in that city, and preached to the people in the streets and at the cross roads. Many of them listened to the wonderful deeds of Christ with avidity, and when we came to His most bitter death, they were unable to restrain their tears. Nevertheless, very few actually became Christians.

Finding, therefore, that the fruit of our labours was small, we went on to Kyoto, the most famous city in all Japan. We spent two months on the road, and passed through many dangers, because we had to go through countries in which war was raging. I say nothing of the cold of those parts, nor of the roads so infested by frequent robberies. When we arrived at Kyoto, we waited for some days that we might obtain leave to approach the king, and ask of him to give us permission to publish the divine law in his kingdom. But we found all ways of access to him altogether closed. And as we discovered that the edicts of the king were generally thought little of among the princes and rulers, we laid aside our design of obtaining from him any such license, and I determined to sound and try the minds and dispositions of the people themselves, so as to find out how disposed that city was to receive the worship of Christ. But as the people were under arms, and under the pressure of a severe war, I judged that the time was most inopportune for the preaching of the Gospel. Kyoto was formerly a very large city; but now, on account of the perpetual calamities it has undergone in war, it is a great part in ruins and waste. At one time, as they say, it contained one hundred and eighty thousand dwellings. It seems to me very likely that it was so, for the wall which encircles it shows that the city was very extensive indeed. Now, although a great part of it is in ruins, it yet contains more than a hundred thousand houses.

When we found that the city of Kyoto was neither at peace nor prepared to receive the Gospel, we returned to Yamaguchi, and we presented to the king there the letters and presents which had been sent as signs of friendship by the Governor of India and the Bishop of Goa. The king was very much delighted both with the letters and with the presents, and that he might reward us, he offered us a great amount of gold and silver. These gifts we sent back, and then asked him that, if he desired to make some acceptable present to the strangers who had come to his city, he would give us leave to announce the law of God to his people, saying that nothing could possibly be more pleasing to us than such a gift. This he granted us with the greatest goodwill.

He accordingly affixed edicts in the most crowded places of the city, declaring that it was pleasing to him that the law of heaven should be announced in his dominions; and that it was lawful for any, who desired, to embrace it. At the same time, he assigned an empty monastery for us to inhabit. A great many used to come to us to this place for the sake of hearing about the new religion. We used to preach twice a day, and after the sermon there was always a good long dispute concerning religion.

Thus we were continually occupied either in preaching or in answering questions. Many bonzes were often

present at the sermons, and a great number of others, both of the common people and of the nobility. The house was always full of men---so full, that at times some were shut out for want of space. Those who asked us questions pressed them so well home, that the answers we gave enabled them thoroughly to understand the falsehood of their own laws and founders, and the truth of the Christian law. After disputes and questionings for many days, they at last began to give in and betake themselves to the faith of Christ.

The first of all to do this were those who in the discussions and questions had shown themselves our most strenuous adversaries. Many of these were persons of good birth, and, when they had embraced Christianity, they became our friends with an amount of warmth which I can find no words to describe. And these new Christians told us with the greatest faithfulness the mysteries, or rather the absurdities, of the Japanese religion. As I said at first, there are as many as nine sects in Japan, and they are very different one from another in their teaching and ordinances. When we got to know the opinions of these sects, we began to look up arguments by which to refute them. So we used to press hard by daily questions and arguments the sorcerer bonzes and other enemies of the Christian law, and we did this so effectually, that at last they did not venture to open their mouths against us when we attacked and refuted them.

When the Christians saw the bonzes convicted and silenced they were of course full of joy, and were daily more and more confirmed in the faith of our Lord. On the other hand, the heathen, who were present at these discussions, were greatly shaken in their own religion, seeing the systems of their fore-fathers giving way. The bonzes were much displeased at this, and when they were present at the sermons and saw that a great number became Christians daily, they began to accuse them severely for leaving their ancestral religion to follow a new faith. But the others answered that they embraced the Christian law because they had made up their minds that it was more in accordance with nature than their own, and because they found that we satisfied their questions while the bonzes did not.

The Japanese are very curious by nature, and as desirous of learning as any people ever were. So they go on perpetually telling other people about their questions and our answers. They desire very much to hear novelties, especially about religion. Even before our arrival, as we are told, they were perpetually disputing among themselves, each one contending that his own sect was the best. But after they had heard what we had to say, they left off their disputes about their own rules of life and religion, and all began to contend about the Christian faith. It is really very wonderful that in so large a city as Yamaguchi in every house and in every place men should be talking constantly about the law of God. But if I were to go into the history of all their questionings, I should have to write on for ever.

The Japanese have a very high opinion of the wisdom of the Chinese, whether as to the mysteries of religion or as to manners and civil institutions. They used to make that a principal point against us, that if things were as we preached, how was it that the Chinese knew nothing about them? After many disputations and questions, the people of Yamaguchi began to join the Church of Christ, some from the lower orders and some from the nobility. In the space of two months quite as many as five hundred have become Christians. Their number is daily being added to; so that there is great cause for joy, and for thanking God that there are so many who embrace the Christian faith, and who tell us all the deceptions of the bonzes, and the mysteries contained in their books and taught by their sects. For those who have become Christians used to belong, one to one sect, another to another; the most learned of each of them explained to us the institutions and rules of his own way of belief. If I had not had the work of these converts to help me, I should not have been able to become sufficiently acquainted with, and so attack, these abominable religions of Japan. It is quite incredible how much the Christians love us. They are always coming to our house to ask whether we have anything at all which we wish them to do for us. All the Japanese appear naturally very obliging; certainly the Christians among them are so very good to us that it would be impossible to exceed their extreme kindness and attentiveness.

May God in His mercy repay them with His favor, and give us all His heavenly bliss! Amen.