

Japan's Holy Martyrs

The Franciscan Story

Fr. Emmanuel Kenners, OSF



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The Japanese martyrs:

A brief sketch of the lives and martyrdom of the Franciscan saints, who were canonized at St. Peter's, in Rome, by Pope Pius IX., on Whit-Sunday, June 8th, 1862

By Fr. Emmanuel Kenners

Authored in the year of Our Lord, 1898

Editing has been made for the purpose to correct typological, grammatical, or spelling errors in the originally work. Any apparent remaining errors in the work have remained by reason of maintaining the intent of the author.

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Introduction

Humility is the foundation of the Christian life: hence the world and religion have been always antagonistic. Not because religion is opposed to man's happiness, but because the pride of the intellect and the pride of the heart have always risen in rebellion against revealed dogmas and the ethics of the Gospel of Christ. To cure this fatal blindness, the Savior not only clothed Himself in our flesh, but lovingly assumed the poverty of the most humble of His creatures. For He wished not only to solace the afflicted, but to rectify our notions, by teaching us to believe most firmly that we are only sojourners here, placed on this globe, as in a preparatory school, to be molded and fitted for an eternal state of existence, where sorrow has no place, and joy no end. His own appearance among us was in poverty and humiliation; and the instruments whom he has selected, in every age of the Church's existence, for the accomplishment of His great designs, have invariably been such as to convince men of good-will, that they were His ambassadors, and that the work in which they were engaged was truly His. That man with finite intellect, and that but rarely cultivated, should refuse submission, is a fatal result of primeval transgression.

And yet a little reflection would suffice to rectify our notions, and lead us to submission. For God, in creating us, and placing us on this earth, must have had a set purpose, and He must have left adequate means at our disposal for ascertaining what that purpose was. Hence,

two things are placed beyond all controversy: God must have spoken, and He must have communicated what He spoke, for our rule and guidance. Since He is the Eternal Wisdom, and is all goodness and love, He never would have created us responsible beings without enabling us to learn with facility by what means we might worship Him and obey His law. In every age of the world He has deputed His ministers to remind us of our duties; and by the power of His grace He has from time to time raised up from among ourselves, glorious examples for our imitation, to convince us that if of ourselves we can do nothing pleasing in His sight, we can do all things with His divine assistance. As God is one and is immutable, so the religion of God must be always one and immutable. To suppose that there can be more than one true religion, is to suppose, what is both paradoxical and blasphemous, that there can be more than one true God. As the human intellect is capable of gradual developments, so the religion of God has undergone gradual developments. But as man is incapable of organic change, so the religion of God is incapable of organic change. The change in man from infancy to puberty, and from puberty to manhood, does not destroy his identity. And the developments which religion has undergone, under the Patriarchs, under Moses, and under Christ, have not destroyed her identity; but, on the contrary, in the different phases of her being, we behold the wisdom of her Author, and see the foundations of her perpetual indestructibility. The reasoning of the renowned St. Vincent, of Lerins, upon the subject, is both solid and beautiful. In the xxviii. chapter of his “Commonitorium,” he says —

“But here, then, perhaps it will be asked, ‘What, must there be no proficiency, no improvement of religion in the Christian Church? Yes, without doubt, very great; for, who can be so envious to man, so professed an en-

emy of God, as to labor against such improvements? But, then, we must be sure not to change Christianity, under the pretense of improving it: for, to improve anything to the utmost, is to enlarge that thing to the just standard and perfection of its own nature. On the other hand, it is not so properly an improvement, as a change, when we mix something heterogeneous, and the thing ceases to be what it was, in its own nature, and becomes of another kind. It is the duty, then, of all in general, and of every individual Christian in particular, in every age of the Church, to increase and grow in understanding, knowledge, and wisdom; but, then, they must continue Christians still, the growth must be natural, in one and the same kind of faith, in the same meaning, and in the same mind.”

“Let this, then, be our rule, let our minds grow in religion, just as our bodies grow in bulk; for these, though by degrees they unfold and disclose that perfect symmetry of parts, which they had before in little, though they expand and enlarge their size, yet continue to be the very same bodies they always were. There is a great difference, it is true, between the flower of youth and the maturity of age; yet the man in his youth, and the man in his old age, is the same man still; and though his stature and looks may be altered, yet his nature is the same, and he the very same person he always Was. Our members, in our infancy, are small, and in our

youth large, but for all this, they are the very same members still; for infants have all the component parts of man, and whatever we find produced by the maturity of age, is nothing but an evolution of that which was in the seed; so that there is no new perfection of essence accruing to man, by growing old, he then has that” only in large, which he had *before* in little.”

“Hence, therefore, it is evident, that this is only the just and regular way of increasing the established and beautiful order of growth, when we always retain the same parts and the same figure; and time does nothing else but spin out those principles to their due proportion, which the wisdom of our Creator formed in us from the beginning. But *now, if the human shape should become deformed and at length degenerate into a figure of another kind, or there should be any addition to , or any diminution from, the just number of parts, such a change, I say, must necessarily either ruin the whole body, or make it monstrous, or certainly weaken it in a very great measure.* In the same manner it is that the Christian religion must grow; this is the rule it must follow in its proficiency and improvement: it is to be corroborated by years, it is by degrees to increase to its just breadth and height; but in all this time of growing, it must continue pure and entire, and perfectly the same in, all its several parts and members. But, to speak more plainly, the Christian faith must

never admit of any alteration in its essential properties, either by augmentation or diminution, but its definition, or essence, must always continue one and the same." In fact, as the same Holy Father writes in the beginning of the same book, chapter III., the doctrines of Christ are only such "*as we find to have been believed in all places, at all times, and by all the faithful.*"

The prophet, Daniel, chap, II., in his interpretation of the mysterious dream of Nebuchadnezzar, briefly, but sublimely, gives the glorious history of the chaste Spouse of Christ, His One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. She is the "little stone cut out of the mountain without hands," but she is to become "a great mountain, and to fill the whole earth." She is to rise upon the ruins of the great mighty Roman Empire, which had nearly swallowed up the whole of the three preceding great monarchies; but as she was not of human device, but the work of God, her sway was to extend to the very limits of the earth, and her duration was to be not only commensurate with all time but to run coeval with the years of eternity. Vain philosophy, human passion, and infernal malice, were to wage perpetual war against her; but God's veracity stands pledged for her security, and their discomfiture. And in order to baffle the tortuous windings of sophistry, and to silence the "*non serviam*" of the depraved human heart, he has, in the persons of His Prophets, His Apostles, His Preachers, and His Saints, chosen "*the weak-things of this world to confound the strong, and the foolish things of this world to confound the wise*"

To enumerate the many heroes whom God has miraculously raised up in the Church, in every age and country, would be a Herculean task, for the history of the world would have to be written; and though

the world itself “could not contain the books that would be written,” yet the task would remain unfinished, since the human memory could not retain the recollection of all the wonders which God has wrought in His Saints, nor the human intellect find adequate language to portray the extent of God’s loving-kindness to his Mien creatures. . .

Yes, God is truly “wonderful in his Saints,” for they have conquered kingdoms, subdued the powers of hell, snatched myriads from perdition, and conducted them to paradise. They have humanized savage and barbarous peoples, and have spread among them the blessings of evangelical education. They have conducted them within the vestibule of science, and imbued them with a knowledge of that Christian civilization which is both the child and the handmaid of Catholicity. On the solemn Feast of Pentecost, June 8th, in this year of grace 1862, the illustrious supreme Pontiff, Pius IX., surrounded by members of the episcopal body from all parts of the world, and by thousands of the clergy, both secular and regular, and of the people, in that masterpiece of human skill, the magnificent Church of St. Peter, the Apostle, and beneath its lofty and ponderous dome, exercising that amplitude of plenary power which, with the keys, he received, through Peter, from Christ, has solemnly enrolled among the Saints twenty-four of those illustrious champions whom, in his might, he has raised up, from time to time, to promote His honor, and to labor for man’s salvation. Twenty-three of the number were members of the Seraphic Order of St. Francis, whose lives were formed upon the model of their holy founder, and whose blood, shed in defense of God and His Holy Church, has watered the ungrateful soil of Japan. What a grand spectacle was presented to view on that solemn day, in that sacred temple! Never was the imposing and mystic rite of Canonization accompanied by such religious pomp and ceremony. Never did so large an assemblage of Bishops and other dignitaries meet together

within the walls of the Holy City. Never was festival surrounded with so bright a halo of glory. Never were more visibly present to men of good-will the interventions of our loving and beneficent God than at this ever-memorable time, when, by means of an impious league entered into by men of the Jacobinical and anti-Christian school with the powers of darkness, the flood-gates of impiety and licentiousness have been opened to engulf dynasties and the everlasting Church, in a common ruin.

In the following pages, an interesting account will be given of the holy Martyrs whom the Church has raised upon her altars. A concise but clear description will be given of Japan, its people and its customs. We shall treat of the introduction of Christianity into that remote region — the progress it made — the persecutions it endured — and its final expulsion. And though we have primarily had in view the lives and martyrdom of those glorious heroes, we propose to make our book one of general utility, in which God's ways to man will be triumphantly vindicated, and the authority of His holy Church placed upon an unassailable basis.

A Description of Japan with the Missionary Labors of St. Francis Xavier

The empire of Japan lies to the east of Asia, and consists of four large islands and several smaller ones. It is bounded on the north by the Straits of Prowse and the Straits of Derbrie, on the west by the Sea of Japan and the Straits of Korea, on the south by the Chinese Sea, and on the east by the Pacific Ocean. It is situated between 31° and 45° north latitude, and between 130° and 143°, 30' east longitude. Its length is about 1,000 miles, and its breadth varies from 50 to 200 miles. Its area is 130,000 square miles, and its population is 25,000,000.

Islands and their Provinces.	Chief Towns.	Situation.	Population of Chief Towns.
1. Nippon, 53 Provinces	{ Jeddo	Gulf of Jeddo.....	1,200,000
	{ Miako	Yedogawa	700,000
	{ Osaka	Gulf of Osaka.....	200,000
2. Kin-sin, 4 Provinces.....	Naugasaki ..	West Coast.....	75,000
3. Sikokf, 9 Provinces.....	Tosa	Seaport	
JAPANESE DEPENDENCIES, CALLED THE GOVERNMENT OF MATSMAI.			
4. Jesco, and some of the } adjacent Islands	{ Matsmai.....	Southern Coast.....	60,000

In winter the cold is excessive; and the heat in summer, though tempered by sea breezes, is extreme. Thunderstorms and hurricanes are frequent. The weather is variable, and heavy falls of rain are usual in midsummer. The soil is rather barren, but not unproductive, owing to the moisture of the climate and the industry of the people. Even the sides of the hills are rendered fruitful, as in China; and the whole face of the country, the most rugged districts excepted, presents one

universal scene of varied and luxuriant vegetation. The productions of the country are pepper, the tea plant, sugar cane, rice, various succulent roots, the sweet potato, pulse of various kinds, turnips, a kind of cabbage from the seeds of which lamp oil is extracted, indigo, several plants used in dyeing, cotton shrubs, the mulberry, varnish, and campfire trees, the vine, the cedar, bamboo reed, both wild and cultivated; and the rhus vermix, which produces a gum-resin, supposed to be the basis of the celebrated black varnish, which derives its name from this country.

In richness of metals, few countries can vie with Japan. Gold is so abundant that, lest its value should diminish, it is prohibited to dig more than a specified quantity. There are also mines of silver, which is here rarer than gold; an abundance of copper, some iron and pit coal, and great quantities of brimstone. There are many warm medicinal springs.

The silk and cotton manufacturers rival those of Europe. The porcelain is esteemed superior to that of China; and the glass is of an excellent description. Many kinds of paper are made from the inner bark of a species of mulberry. Copper, wrought and in bars, precious stones, pearls of exquisite beauty, and lacquered wares, are the principal exports. All trade with Europeans is prohibited, except with the Dutch, who originally purchased the privilege by trampling upon the image of their crucified Lord. The harbors are crowded with vessels, and the inland trade is very considerable.

In no part of Asia are quadrupeds so scarce, as the Japanese, who are great agriculturalists, consider them injurious to their favorite pursuit. Neither sheep nor goats are allowed in the country; but dogs, in some rare instances, are kept, and these only from a superstitious motive. Wolves and foxes are occasionally to be met with. The waters teem with fish, and fowls are abundant.

The government of Japan is an absolute hereditary monarchy, holding the supreme power over a number of absolute hereditary principalities. The government of each province is entrusted to a prince, who is responsible, to the Cubo, or secular emperor, for his administration, leaving his family as hostages at the emperor's court. The laws are few, and are rigidly, but impartially administered. They are remarkably severe, most crimes being by them made capital; but the sentence cannot be carried into execution without the signature of the Privy Council at Jeddo. Parents and guardians are held responsible for the crimes of those whose education has been confided to their care. The laws are posted up in every village and town, in large letters, in a place surrounded with rails. The army consists of 1 00,000 infantry and 20,000 cavalry: the navy is insignificant.

The empire of Japan appears to have commenced about 600 years before the Christian era. Until 1,150 A.D., the supreme power was in the hands of the Dairi, an ecclesiastical monarch; but a contest regarding the succession then arose - one of the competitors assumed the title and prerogatives of Cubo, or secular emperor, while the other retained the title of Dairi, with the management of religious affairs. At present the Dairi resides in great pomp at Miako; while the Cubo, whose court is at Jeddo, affects to pay him a kind of homage, as if he did but act as his deputy, whereas, in effect, he is the real sovereign.

The language is so peculiar, that it is understood by no other people. They print with a kind of fixed wooden blocks. The schools are numerous; some of those at Miako have 3,000 or 4,000 scholars. Arithmetic, music, painting, geography, rhetoric, history (especially that of their own country), astronomy, poetry, and domestic economy, make up the ordinary course of study. In Japan, the Chinese is the learned or classic language.

The Japanese are active and dexterous, and of a hardy constitution. Their yellow complexion sometimes inclines to brown, or passes into a pale white. They are chiefly distinguished by a peculiarity in the eyes, which in them are farther from a round shape than in any other people. They have, for the most part, large heads, short necks, and thick black hair. Their moral character is precisely what may be expected from a people involved in all the superstitions and impieties of idolatry. Their manners are, in many respects, diametrically opposite to those of the Europeans — the Turks, in some cases, excepted. Our common drinks are cold — those of the Japanese are hot; we uncover the head out of respect — they the feet; we are fond of white teeth — they of black; we get on horseback on the left side — they on the right. Their houses are of wood, two stories high at most, and are divided in the interior by movable partitions, sliding in grooves. They take their repast — which is served to each in a basin of porcelain, or on a square salver of japanned ware — sitting on mats or carpets spread on the floor. Their food consists almost entirely of fish, fowl, eggs, and vegetables.

The student of ecclesiastical history must have occasionally remarked that the ground that religion lost in one part of the world was usually gained in another. The remarkable events that happened in the sixteenth century led directly to that conclusion. The great defection in Europe from the ancient faith of Christ's Church was compensated by the conversion of infidel nations in Asia and America. St. Francis Xavier, one of St. Ignatius's first companions, was the chosen instrument for that great work. This illustrious apostle of the Indies and Japan derived his pedigree from a noble family of Navarre; he was born in the Castle of Xavier, at the foot of the Pyrenees, in 1506; having gone through the lower studies of humanity, in Spain, he went to the University of Paris, where he completed a regular course of philosophy

and divinity, and took a master's degree. Under the direction of St. Ignatius, he laid the foundation of that eminent sanctity which has raised the admiration of these latter ages. The singular success that accompanied his missionary functions at Venice, Bologna, and Rome, determined the Pope, Paul III., and St. Ignatius to select him as most perfectly qualified for the Indian mission which John III., King of Portugal, was eager to establish. Xavier received his mission from the Pope himself, with the powers of Nuncius Apostolicus, and began his journey to Portugal. He embarked at Lisbon on the 7th of April, 1541, in the thirty-fifth year of his age; and on the 6th of May, in the following year, landed at Goa, the capital of the Portuguese settlements in India.

Goa is a considerable town, situated on an island of the same name, originally built by the Moors, and taken from them by the Portuguese in 1510. For the advancement of religion, it was erected into a bishop's see, and the viceroy there fixed his residence. Xavier found the city in a most deplorable state of ignorance and corruption. Mahometan Moors and degenerate Christians composed the bulk of its inhabitants. The Portuguese lived more like infidels than Christians, who, having no religious instruction, and being awed by no ecclesiastical authority, lay immersed in a gulf of all those disorderly habits that the thirst for gain, unbridled lust, and revenge, usually create. To reform this second Babylon was the first undertaking of the apostolic Xavier. His labors were incessant; the grace of the Holy Ghost gave unction and effect to his words. Within the course of a few months, he had the satisfaction of seeing Goa wholly changed into a new city, both in principle and manners. From Goa, the holy missionary turned his eyes toward the coast of the peninsula, which stretches to the south and ends in a point, called Cape Comorin. The country was covered with villages, well peopled, governed by their own chiefs in alliance

with the Portuguese. Though little skilled in the Malabar language; Xavier had the address to make himself understood by the idolatrous inhabitants. His engaging manner, his humility, and readiness to help them drew their respect and attention; they listened, the grace of God infused understanding, they believed, and asked to be baptized. He pursued his course along the coast, and entered the populous kingdom of Travancor, near Cape Comorin. Here the harvest of souls was very abundant; in the space of one month, as he himself informs us, he baptized with his own hand 10,000 souls. In a short time the whole kingdom became Christian; the idolatrous temples were everywhere pulled down, and no less than forty-five churches were erected to the living God. Here the Saint seems to have received the gift of tongues for the first time; here he wrought many miracles — he restored the sick instantaneously to health, and raised four persons from death to life, as is juridically proved. From thence he crossed over to the eastern shore of the peninsula, and went along as far as Meliapor, where St. Thomas the Apostle is said to have suffered martyrdom. The Portuguese gave credit to the tradition, and they built a town, which they named St. Thomas's, in honor of that holy apostle.

Ardent in the pursuit of making the name of Jesus Christ known to the remotest inhabitants of the east, Xavier went on board a vessel at St. Thomas's, sailed across the Gulf of Bengal to Malacca, and from thence to the islands of Molucca, preaching the faith of Christ in every place he came to. In Malacca he met with a native of Japan, whom he converted, and baptized by the name of Paul. Paul accompanied him to the Moluccas, from whence they sailed together to Japan, and landed at Cangoxima, the birth-place of Paul. Japan is, as was stated before, a general name given to a cluster of islands lying in the extremity of the east, opposite to China, between the thirtieth and forty-fifth degrees of northern latitude. The productions of the country in gold,

silver, and other precious commodities, afford a lucrative trade to the European merchants. The supreme power of governing is vested, it will be remembered, in an emperor, under whom several petty kings exercise a dependent power. The Japanese are naturally ingenious, and lovers of science, but miserably imposed upon by their hypocritical priests, called Bonzes, who, under the outward show of Pagan rites and sacrifices, delude the people, and provide themselves with every luxury for the indulgence of an idle and voluptuous life. To these idolaters, Xavier began to announce the first tidings of Christianity. Though thousands were converted, yet the progress of the gospel among them was not equal to his zeal or his expectations. Besides the strong opposition of the Bonzes, he found that the high esteem in which the Chinese were held by the people of Japan, was the next great obstacle to their conversion. When convinced of the Christian truths, and pressed to relinquish their idolatrous worship, many would ask if the Chinese had relinquished theirs. Powerful is the influence that example has at all times over the manners and opinions of men; here it was insuperable; nothing could remove it but the very conversion of the Chinese, whom the Japanese looked up to as to their masters in religious matters. The time for the conversion of China was not yet come, but Xavier resolved to make the attempt, hoping that by gaining one populous empire to the faith of Christ, he should gain another. With that religious view he left Japan, where he had labored two years and a half, and embarked for China. He landed on the island of Sanciano, near the continent, but was permitted to go no farther. It pleased God there to visit him with his last sickness. A burning fever put an end to his apostolic labors and opened to him the gate of everlasting rest on the second day of December, 1552. He was a little more than forty-six years of age.

During the ten years which this illustrious Saint employed in the east, for the propagation of the Catholic religion, astonished infidels beheld the miracles and wonders renewed by him, in the name and by the power of his Divine Master, which the first ages of Christianity had witnessed in the apostles. A new world, converted by the preaching and miraculous powers of one man; idolatrous kings bending their necks to the yoke of Christ; the sound of the gospel heard for the first time in the very extremity of the terraqueous globe; and the one, holy, Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman faith established in regions too

remote to be noticed by antiquity, are among the glorious trophies of the sixteenth century.¹

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1. It was in 1549, nearly a century after the discovery of Japan by the Portuguese, that St. Francis Xavier landed on its shores. He baptized great numbers, and drew whole provinces to the faith. The powerful kings of Avana, Bungo, and Omura, sent, in 1582, a solemn embassy, declaratory of obedience, to Pope Gregory XIII. Their letters will be found in Chapter IV. There were among the Christians in Japan at that time several kings, princes, and bonzes. In 1588, the emperor Cambacundono commenced a sanguinary persecution, which was renewed in four years after, but became most severe under his successor in 1597. At that period, owing to the calumnies of the Dutch merchants, desirous of monopolizing the trade of the country, twenty-six martyrs suffered, and all the missionaries, with the exception of twenty-eight, were banished. After the death of the emperor Taiko-Sama, the missionaries returned, and in three years converted upwards of 70,000 persons, and erected fifty churches. The persecution was again renewed in 1602; in it and in the subsequent persecutions, both general and partial, it is stated that not less than 1,200,000 Catholics suffered death for their faith. There are still many Christians in Japan. The people of Japan adore idols of the most grotesque shapes: the priests are called Bonzes; all obey the Jaco, or high priest.

The Jesuit, Franciscan, and Dominican Missions

Immediately after the discovery of Japan, the tidings thereof were speedily conveyed into Europe. An ardent desire to extend the kingdom of God's Church inflamed the hearts, and aroused the energies of men called by God to missionary labors. Their zeal became inflamed, for they felt that they had received a call to labor for the promotion of God's honor and the salvation of newly discovered peoples "sitting in darkness and the shadow of death." Catholic Europe was moved to compassionate the unhappy votaries of pagan rites and pagan ethics; and whilst the preachers of the word, acting in the spirit of obedience to lawful authority, were severing themselves from all natural ties, and binding themselves to devote all their energies, and even to sacrifice their lives, if necessary, for the extension of religion and the salvation of the human family, there were not wanting generous souls, in every rank in life from the throne to the cottage, who nobly contributed charitable offerings for the promotion of so laudable an enterprise. Christopher Columbus, an illustrious Genoese, amid an array of countless difficulties, commenced a splendid career of gigantic discoveries. The event was the commencement of a new era, and the time was opportune. The whole of the old world was nearly buried under

an accumulated load of vices; the passions were headstrong; insubordination was general and insulting; the authority of the Church

was little heeded; the “watchmen of Israel” were nodding at their posts; and heresy and licentiousness were just emerging from the pit to labor for the general overthrow of all laws, both human and divine. The base ingratitude of ancient Christendom was about to receive an awful chastisement; but, as the Church would much stand in need of recruits to fill up the ranks of defection, God opened a passage to a new world hitherto unheard of, containing millions of souls, who were to be brought out of worse than Egyptian darkness “into God’s admirable light,” and to take that position in the Church from which the northern nations of Europe were fast falling away. The success of Columbus wonderfully stimulated the zeal of men of an enterprising genius; it gave an impetus to their labors; and it very materially tended to develop the latent powers of the human mind. Navigation became an important, and, to many, an all-engrossing study; for, by means of that science, intercommunication was to take place between all the nations of the earth, irrespective of distance or dissimilarity of habits. All obstacles to free intercourse — all impediments to commercial interchanges — all difficulties in the way of the evangelization of the world — were to be gradually removed by the touch of its magic influence.

The discovery of the new world was both a subject of joy intense and of grief profound. To the man of the world, whose life is spent in amassing wealth, and to whom no toil is irksome which is remunerative, the recent discoveries were a subject of much joy and thankfulness. To the man whose heart is burning with love towards God and men, the news that millions were enslaved to their passions, and ignorant of the law of their God, afforded food for reflection; it drew forth tears of compassion, and it stimulated missionary zeal. Amidst the awful degeneracy of the times, and the too general corruption of manners, especially among the Scandinavian nations, there