Religion in the early modern age

Early modern age

* Warring States Period [Sengoku] (c.1460-1573)
* Azuchi-Momoyama (1573-1603)
* Edo (1603-1867)

The Coming of Christianity

Encounter with Catholicism

* In 1549 St. Francis Xavier arrived in Japan with a party of fellow Jesuits.
* He visited Kyoto via Kagoshima and Yamaguchi.
* He studied Japanese religion. At first he translated the biblical God as "Dainichi." Afterwards he changed it to "Deus."

Spread of the Christians

* Some lords were baptized; by the death of Nobunaga, less than thirty-five years after the missionaries first came, as many as 150,000 Japanese were Christians.
* Nobunaga allowed the Catholic missionaries to build a Catholic church (Nanban-ji) in the middle of Kyoto in 1576.
Persecution of Christians

- At first Toyotomi Hideyoshi seemed complacent toward religion, without the vindictiveness of Nobunaga.
- In 1587 he suddenly turned against the missionaries in an edict forbidding their activities.
- In 1597 the twenty-six martyrs of Nagasaki, both European and Japanese, both Franciscans and Jesuits, perished on crosses at Hideyoshi’s order.

Spread and extermination

- The number of the Catholic believers reached about 700,000 in the early 17th century.
- The Tokugawa regime enacted increasingly harsh decrees against Christianity.
- Christians were tortured until they recanted or died, and were forced to stamp on crucifixes.

Rebellion in Shimabara

- In 1637 a rebellion broke out in Shimabara in Kyushu, a Christian stronghold, but it was finally suppressed.
- Secret/Hidden Christians (Kakure Kirishitan)
  - They, without priests, had kept alive sometimes garbled versions of the Lord’s Prayer, the Hail Mary, and the Creed, and worshiped by such ingenious devices as placing a crucifix behind a Buddhist image.

Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801)

- Canonizing Kojiki (Chronicle of Ancient Times)
- Connecting Amaterasu (Goddess) to the genealogy of the Emperor’s family
Hirata Atsutane (1776-1843)

- The revival of Shinto
- He tried to absolutize the emperor based on the ancient chronicles.
- He criticized the Shinto mixing with Confucianism and Buddhism.

Rediscovery of the ancient Japan

- Finding the in-depth ancient layer of Japan and resisting Western civilization
- Re-canonization of the ancient chronicles
- The renewal of Shinto in the late Edo period provided the ideological foundations of the Meiji Restoration’s imperial monarchism.