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REVIEW

**M. Antoni J. Ucerler, S.J.: *The Samurai and the Cross: The Jesuit Enterprise in Early Modern Japan***

**xxii, 445 pp. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022. ISBN 978 0 19 5335439.**

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Nearly five centuries after the first Jesuits set foot on the island of Tanegashima, the history of the encounter between Westerners and Japanese still fascinates numerous scholars and students. Religious aspects of these exchanges, such as the acculturation of Christianity, its understanding by the Japanese, or the discovery of Buddhism by the missionaries, have been at the heart of countless books and articles. However, fathoming the thoughts of the historical actors of the so-called Christian century of Japan (1549–c. 1650) is replete with hurdles, the highest being linguistic. Indeed, the most outstanding studies generally resort to primary sources penned in various Roman languages and different registers of the Japanese language. Thanks to the impressive linguistic skills and intimate knowledge of Christianity and Buddhism of its author, *The Samurai and the Cross* is a book that belongs beyond doubt to this category.

Antoni Ucerler investigates several dilemmas faced by the missionaries, particularly the Jesuits, while diffusing Christianity in Japan, a land thrown since the end of the fifteenth century into endless wars without any previous ties with the Judaeo-Christian world and monotheism. Two central ideas underlie the twelve chapters: 1) the fathers and brothers of the Company of Jesus were far from constituting a monolithic organization sharing the same approach of Japan's evangelization; 2) the main bone of contention among the missionaries was related to the use of force to propagate or defend the faith. The latter topic is not a new one: Takase Kōichirō 高瀬弘一郎 published in the 1970s his first articles on the Jesuit advocates of a military endeavour in Japan and historians of literature have explored in detail the *topos* of the “Christian invaders” in the widely read anti-Christian tales of the Edo period (1603–1867). Ucerler is nonetheless the first scholar to analyse this question in a comprehensive (and subtle) manner that takes fully into consideration its intellectual background.

The book is divided into three parts, the first, entitled “Re-inventing Christianity”, concerns the adaptation of Christianity to sixteenth-century Japanese mores and practices. In chapters 1, 2, and 3, the author primarily resorts to two kinds of sources: cases of conscience entrusted to leading theologians in the Iberian empire and a compendium of Aristotelian philosophy and Thomistic theology redacted in Latin by the vice-provincial of Japan, Pedro Gómez (1533–1600), between 1583/4 and 1593, and translated into Japanese in 1595. It was used as a textbook for the *Collegio*, the “Jesuit College of Higher Studies in Japan”. The analysis of these sources, which covers a large spectre of moral and theological issues as the participation of converts to Shinto–Buddhist rites,