

Hidden Christianity in the Sakaime Area on Ikitsuki Island:

— A Case Study on Multi-Faith Religion —

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Hidden Christianity – a unique form of religion in Japan – is not well-known in modern society. Japanese people now perceive it as a custom of the past, yet it is still pursued by devout believers in several regions in Nagasaki Prefecture, including Ikitsuki Island, the Sotome area and the Goto Islands. In other words, hidden Christianity remains the object of their faith even today. This paper will focus on the areas where the religion is practiced and its religious rites are performed. This means that other areas with the relics and legends of hidden Christianity are not examined here.

This paper will introduce the current practice of hidden Christianity in the Sakaime area on Ikitsuki Island in Nagasaki Prefecture based on a field study. Even though the religious body has been dissolved, the religion itself continues to thrive in the area, as will be explained later. Hidden Christians in the area are shrine parishioners and Buddhists at the same time, like people living in other areas of the island. With several religions intertwined, how these islanders face their gods, accommodate multiple religions and observe religious rites in their daily lives will be discussed, preceded by a brief outline of hidden Christianity.