

4 Saving Souls in Japan

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After expounding on the issues faced by Francisco Cabral during his initial years as superior of Japan, the following two chapters will analyse the second half of his stay in the country, through the lenses of salvation. After 1573, the morale of Cabral, as illustrated in the previous pages, took a turn for the worse. This anguish for the future of the mission can be attributed to different, concomitant causes, but at the root of it was his belief that God had forsaken the mission. This chapter will look at the causes behind this conviction of Cabral's; it will examine the conversions of the Japanese people and, more specifically, the relationship that Cabral's writings attributed to them and the salvation of the missionaries.

Based on the number of conversions made, the 1570s was a successful decade for the Japanese mission. Nevertheless, tension is detectable in Cabral's correspondence that focuses on the future of the enterprise. Instead of understanding the mission's growing size as a sign of God's favour, his letters express an apparently counterintuitive anxiety, and discouragement, due to the quality he attributed to the Japanese converts and the way they had converted. To contextu-

alise Cabral's reading of the events, this chapter will define the concept of conversion in early modern Catholicism, and in the Society of Jesus more specifically, and look at how divine grace was understood to work during conversion. The missionary point of view and the native response to the Christian ideas surrounding conversion will then be considered to show how these different understandings were often at the root of the perceived low spiritual quality of the converts. Subsequently, this chapter will trace the history of mass conversion that characterised the Japanese mission in these years, Cabral's implementation and support of these methods, and the anxieties that they caused.

4.1 Jesuit Missions and Salvation

Since its beginning, on the basis that "mission trumps asceticism", the Society of Jesus was characterised by spreading beyond Catholic lands (Mooney 2009, 195). In the early modern period, the Society built its presence outside Europe on the Iberian empires and, more specifically, created its own Asian network by building on the Portuguese seaborne empire. The Jesuits in Asia in the second half of the sixteenth century did not employ, as a general rule, the term "mission" to indicate their activities; they spoke of "the enterprise of Japan", or "the work of the conversions", or similar expressions, as examples in this study have shown. Moving towards the seventeenth century, however, these activities, not necessarily limited to extra-European countries, came to be referred to as "mission". The usage of this term by Jesuit missionaries influenced the evolution of the word's general meaning, which before had been mostly understood as closer to its Latin etymon, *mitto* (to send). In the *Constitutions* and Ignatian spirituality, alongside personal (the call to be sent) and territorial (the specific location) connotations, the word "mission" carried an operative meaning as well: it indicated the sum of the activities carried out in a location (Sievernich 2010, 255-7). For instance, "mission", when used in the fourth vow, indicated a mobile ministry whose objective was the "greater help of souls", that is, people (O'Malley 1993, 299). It follows that these activities were numerous and varied, evangelisation being one of many (Mooney 2009, 201). They were all considered acceptable as Jesuit work because, regardless of their specific nature, their common aim was understood as the "help of souls": the original objective behind the creation of the Society.

A crucial point for the contextualisation of the behaviour of the missionaries in the field, however, is understanding whose souls exactly are the object of salvation. There is a tendency in historiography to depict Jesuit ministry in a way that prioritises the Jesuits' aspiration to save other people's souls, a characterisation stemming

from the Society's predisposition to engage with the world. However, Thomas V. Cohen has shown how, in the sixteenth century, a great incentive for applicants to the Society of Jesus was the salvation of their own souls. In the self-descriptions of its members, this personal salvation appears more important than the desire to save souls in the Indies, the fight against the Reformation, or other objectives that have been presented as central in the historical depictions of the order (Cohen 1974).¹ Luke Clossey builds on Cohen's findings to refute the stereotype of the Jesuit dedicated only to the salvation of others, but he also shows how most of those who displayed extreme interest only in their own salvation left the Society for the Carthusian order. The greater part of the remaining group displayed a balanced concern for their own souls and for those of others (Clossey 2008, 121-3). This is also true of missionaries: since the ministries trying to save other people's souls could, simultaneously, bring about the perfection and salvation of the worker's own soul, the mission was considered a perfect ground for obtaining both, thanks to the possibilities for martyrdom and hard work in the name of God it offered (123).

Still, the number of conversions he brought about was not a criterion on which the missionary could base the certainty of his salvation. Francis Xavier's so-called Great Letter from Japan provides an indicator of the ideal Jesuit attitude when he states:

Look carefully after yourselves, brothers mine in Jesus Christ, because there are many in hell who, when alive, were cause and instrument, with their words, of the salvation and acceptance into the glory of heaven of others.²

In other words, just because a Jesuit had won many conversions did not mean that his soul would necessarily be saved. Xavier exhorts his fellow Jesuits to focus on the long path towards interior perfection, where the number of converts obtained is secondary. If missions are understood as an especially efficient tool to facilitate the missionary's salvation, it is because they force him to abandon any hope for earthly help and put all his faith in God:

God did us a great and distinguished mercy by sending us in these parts of infidels, so that we would not be distracted from ourselves. Because this land is full of idolatry and enemies of Christ, and there is nobody we can trust and have faith in, except for God [...] and for this reason we are forced to put all our faith, hope,

1 See also Alden 1996, 36-8.

2 Francisco Xavier to the Jesuits in Goa, Kagoshima, 5 November 1549, in *DJ*, 1: 150.

and confidence in Christ Our Lord, and not in living creatures, because due to their unfaithfulness, they are all enemies of God.³

In typical Jesuit fashion, obedience appeared here as a crucial tool to oppose the sin of hubris that a bountiful evangelisation might incite in the missionary, who was encouraged to find support against this sin in his superiors. Cabral, conscious of this danger but unable to find solace in obedience himself, strove to attribute any evangelisation success to divine intervention, which caused unexpected downsides.

4.2 The Vocabulary of Conversion

Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian, in their introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Conversion*, suggest that “[p]erhaps the most straightforward, even if insufficient, way to understand conversion is as ‘change’ or ‘transformation’”. As they consider a wider context than that of Western (modern) Christianity, they specify that the meaning of “conversion”, and even its essence, changes not only from religion to religion, but also diachronically (Rambo, Farhadian 2014, 9). This section will therefore examine the use the sources make of this word and the concepts connected to it.

With the Christianisation of most of Europe in the early medieval period, the initial idea of conversion as an adoption of Christianity by a pagan person (or a whole people) slowly lost its meaning. It came to indicate a deepening of piety in someone who was already a Christian, and in time it was linked to the idea of *metanoia* (*paenitentia* or *conversio*). This latter word indicated “a change that affects the direction, conduct, and shape of one’s life – a deep moral and spiritual change”; it was also translated with “penance” (Finn 1997, 22-5).⁴

The first Jesuits understood themselves as having undergone this same process of changing one’s life by turning it towards God, when entering the Society. The *Spiritual Exercises*, whose general objective was indeed *metanoia*, were one important tool to achieve this conversion (Starkloff 1974, 154-5). The guiding example was also provided by Ignatius Loyola’s change of heart in 1521. The transformation instigated by Loyola’s repudiation of his old knightly values and his acceptance of more pious ones allowed his followers to refer to this as “conversion”, an act that “turn[ed] one’s life and will over to the care of God” (O’Malley 1993, 19). This influenced the Jesuit understanding of conversion, which they identified as a choice based

³ Francis Xavier to the Jesuits in Goa, Kagoshima, 5 November 1549, in *DJ*, 1: 158.

⁴ See also Kling 2014, 598-9.

upon spirituality (Chakravarti 2013, 524), which was not necessarily true of all interpretations of the event of conversion.

The term 'conversion', as used in the sixteenth century in religious contexts, is therefore to be understood in a broad sense. It indicated a change or a renewal of the relationship between a person and God (as is the case of Loyola); this could include a change of religious affiliation, as long as it comprised a movement towards God (such as the members of the Jewish or Muslim communities of Europe). This second meaning of conversion still implied the acceptance of God in one's life but acted on people who were not Christian. It follows that such a broad range of meanings attributed to this word comes with an important limitation: contrary to its modern, more comprehensive meaning, in the sixteenth century, 'conversion' was used only to refer to a person becoming a Christian.⁵ This included, in the divided religious landscape of sixteenth-century Europe, becoming the desirable kind of Christian, Catholic or Reformed depending on the religious affiliation of the speaker. This restriction (as it appears from a modern-day point of view) was arguably due to the word's original meaning of "turning towards God", which prevented, by definition, a turn towards any divinity who was not held to be a true God.

Some examples can illustrate how this use of conversion was the most commonplace in the early modern period, both from Europe and the Mediterranean area. A change of allegiance to a different confession of Christianity was considered a conversion by the members of the faith that received the neophyte: a Protestant who became Catholic had converted only from the point of view of other Catholics; for the Protestants, they had apostatised.⁶ However, most conversions to Judaism remained secret, given the dangers that discovery could cause. The most common phenomenon of this kind was the reversion of Jewish people, who had previously converted to Christianity, in Spain and Portugal. Christian authorities generally referred to these as "Judaizers" (Mulsow, Popkin 2004, 6-9).⁷ As Islam underwent a taxonomic change from paganism to heresy, Muslims were held to be apostates from Christianity as well (Moran Cruz 1999, 56-66). Christians who had become Muslims were instead referred to as "renegados" who had "mahumetised" or "turned Turk" (Matar 1998, 22-3; Krstić 2011, 20-1).

A similar situation is found in the Jesuit Asian missions in the second half of the sixteenth century. A perusal of correspondence from or about Japan suggests that the main instance in which the term of

⁵ The modern common usage of the word can be defined as "a formal change of adherence from one religious system to another" (Smith et al. 1995).

⁶ Examples can be found in Luria 1996.

⁷ See also Segal 2014, 595.

“conversion” was correlated to a local religion was when the boundaries of the religion and Christianity were not yet defined. A prominent example is Nicolao Lancillotto’s 1548 report on Anjiro’s description of Japan. At the time, the Jesuits had not yet reached the archipelago and misunderstood Buddha Shakyamuni as a representative of the Christian God (Zampol D’Ortia, Dolce, Pinto 2021, 70-2). Lancillotto writes,

In that land [India], many gods were worshipped. This Sciacca preached that there was only one God, creator of all things. He preached so efficiently this truth that he *converted* all the people to the worship of a single God, and had all the idols of that land destroyed.⁸

Elsewhere in the same document, all of China has reportedly converted to these beliefs of Sciacca, which include “worshipping a single God, creator of all things” and praying to “the saints, who pray [to] God” on behalf of the worshippers, “like [Catholics] do” (*DJ*, 1: 60-1). The desire of finding long-sought Christians in Asia completely overcomes Lancillotto’s text, making it possible for the idea of “conversion” to be applied to Asian religions.

Aside from this exception, writings on Asia present a similar concept of conversion, exclusively for a new affiliation to the Catholic faith. For example, Alessandro Valignano’s *Historia del principio y progreso de la Compañía de Jesús en las Indias orientales* (1583) speaks of the conversion to Christianity “of the gentiles” (Valignano 1944, 7) and “of the infidels” (53). Previous and subsequent written production of the Japanese mission follows this usage as well. Aside from the innumerable mentions of the “conversion of Japan” and similar expressions, some examples can be found in the description of the overall objective of the mission by Frois: “this great enterprise that was the objective of the Fathers – the conversion [*conversão*] of the souls” (*Historia*, 1: 42). On an influential Buddhist monk who became Christian, Luís de Almeida writes, “thanks to his converting [*converter*], many others became Christians”.⁹ Lamenting the errors committed by the first preachers in Japan, Melchior Nunes Barreto writes of “the beginning of the conversions”,¹⁰ without fearing that anyone might misunderstand the new religious affiliation that this expression implies.¹¹

⁸ Nicolao Lancillotto, Kochi, 28 December 1548, in *DJ*, 1: 53; emphasis added.

⁹ Luís de Almeida to Antonio de Quadros, Funai (Oita), 1 October 1561, in *DJ*, 2: 381.

¹⁰ Melchior Nunes Barreto to Diego Lainez, Kochi, 13 January 1558, in *DJ*, 2: 109.

¹¹ It is possible to see, from the use of these expressions, that the word “mission” was not yet in use with its contemporary meaning, as stated above.

Correspondence from Japan provided a description of the process of transitioning from one Buddhist school to another, albeit rarely, probably because the topic was not considered edifying to European readership. Frois narrates the religious questioning of a Japanese man in this way:

As a youth, he first *entered* the religious order of the Tendai school, at the university of Mt Hiei. After learning the Chinese letters, since he was of clear and delicate intelligence, he could not find peace in the way of proceeding of that school. [So] he *became* of another called Jōdo, which worships Amida. But since it seemed ridiculous and unworthy of his knowledge, he *passed* to another one that is called Shingon, where they worship a Buddha called Dainichi [...] As this sect too seemed full of confusion and sooty darkness, he left it as a lightless thing and *moved on* to Shintō, which is the sect of the *kami* [...] But since he did not find what he wanted there, he *became* [an affiliated of] Zen. (*Historia*, 1: 174-5; emphasis added)

Changing religious affiliation, therefore, when not related to Christianity, was not understood as a conversion. The words used to describe this process do not appear to have a strong religious connotation. “Entering” (*entrou*), “becoming” (*se fez*), “passing” (*passou*): the narrative lists these actions as mundane (and thus superficial) decisions that bring no satisfaction to this bright man looking for salvation.

Francisco Cabral also followed this common usage. He described mass conversions to Buddhism using terms such as “follow...a law” or “take another [law]:”

If [their lords] order them to follow a specific law they do it easily, and they leave the one they followed. If the lord does not authorise them to take another one, however much that they desire it, they don't do it.¹²

As was commonplace at the time, particularly before Valignano, Cabral uses the word “law” to indicate the various religious affiliations of the Japanese in this passage. Japanese laws could indicate the worship of Buddha or Kami, but could also refer to specific schools, such as Jōdo (Pure Land Buddhism) or Shingon. Often, however, they were also those of God: “our holy Law”. When it came to Christianity, though, the Japanese were not “taking another law” anymore; God, instead, makes “much fruit in the conversions” (JapSin 7, I, 20r), a term that Cabral used exclusively for Christianity.

¹² Cabral to the General, Nagasaki, 5 September 1571, in JapSin 7, I, 20v.

4.3 Practices of Conversion and Baptism in Japan

Tied as it was to Christianity, the idea of conversion as conceptualised by Europeans was often alien to the Asian cultures with which the Jesuits came into contact. This led the missionaries on the field to criticise most forms of Christianity that they did not recognise as true conversions (Gerbner 2015, 135).¹³

Discussing the reception of the concept among non-European cultures, Ananya Chakravarti points to the lack of clarity regarding the process of conversion, even among the missionaries, as a reason for the emerging of “local interpretations” (Chakravarti 2013, 508). The resulting difference in understanding often caused a deterioration in the relations between the missionaries and those they wished to convert. One example presented by Chakravarti shows how these misunderstandings could have serious consequences in the long term, such as when the Jesuit missionaries condemned the Brazilian Tupi as irremediably inconstant in matters of faith (115n32). Alan Strathern finds a similar situation when considering South-East Asian conversion to Islam. He highlights a tendency of conversion to be a process not of leaving behind old rites but instead of adopting new ones alongside them, and he suggests it was a “more gradual process in which quite superficial signifiers of Islam were merely added to an existing repertoire of sacrality”.¹⁴ Christianity in Japan was in a similar situation (Morris 2022).

Even as the Catholic Church was engaged in debates on justification with the Reformed Protestants, the exact way in which conversion worked seems to have been difficult to parse even to Catholic missionaries. In the early sixteenth century, the popular understanding of grace was that it could be swayed by good works, in a sort of “quid-pro-quo” relationship; the Council of Trent (1545-63) attempted to find a balance between this belief (accused of Pelagian inclinations) and a total dependence on God’s grace (which was the Reformed position) (O’Malley 2002, 47; 104; 113-15). Knowledge, will, and acceptance of the basic tenets of Catholicism were held as necessary to salvation, but, as a Christian mystery, their relationship to divine grace was complex to grasp. Because conversion was considered a necessary step for salvation and was conceptually very close to it, the uncertainty surrounding the nature of grace muddled the understanding of the mechanisms of conversion as well. While the characteristics of an ideal candidate could be considered self-evi-

¹³ On this matter, Higashibaba, (2001, xvi-xvii) highlights the problematic trend of historians to accept uncritically the category of “convert” as defined by the missionaries.

¹⁴ Strathern 2013, 40-1. A similar process is delineated in North America by Gerbner 2015, 139-40.

dent (they had “the motivation, the sincerity, and the doctrinal comprehension”, Strathern 2007, 114), the minimum conditions that had to be met for conversion were not similarly clear.

The sacrament of baptism had been held mandatory for salvation since the fourth century because it endowed “the soul with the gift of the holy spirit”, in addition to signalling the admission of the person in the community of the faithful (Muir 1997, 20-1). The mass baptisms carried out in Iberian colonies in America and similar episodes suggest that, at the beginning of the European expansion, willingness to receive baptism was considered enough to make a person a Christian. This impression had emerged from the perceived lack of opposition to this sacrament that the local cultures had shown the missionaries, possibly when compared to Jewish and Muslim people in the Iberian Peninsula. By the mid-sixteenth century, Catholic authorities realised that baptism alone was not conducive to the desired change in the converts' lives, adding to the anxiety that had been surrounding this rite since the forced conversions in Portugal and Spain had failed to produce “good Christians” (Prosperi et al. 1998, 19-22).

Debates on the internal workings of conversion also broke out in Asia, if more moderately.¹⁵ Jesuit missionaries had conducted mass baptisms in Portuguese India since 1555, finding justification in the practices of the primitive Church, making them commonplace by 1559 (Alberts 2013, 134; López-Gay 1966, 165). Even as the ecclesiastical council of Goa confirmed that grace was an essential element of conversion, in 1568, the archbishopric established that no catechumens could be baptised without having received some religious instruction beforehand, in their own language. The depth of this instruction was not specified; after baptism had been received, a betterment of the recipient's spiritual state could be achieved by additional learning and receiving other sacraments (Strathern 2007, 114-15; López-Gay 1966, 42). Cabral's preoccupations about mass baptism suggest that even missionaries who supported this practice were doubting its efficiency, complicating their perception of the manner and circumstances in which divine grace would intervene.

Mass baptism with little or no education stopped being considered viable by the end of the seventeenth century, especially by the Society of Jesus. Already mid-century, missionaries of the *Missions Étrangères* had taken a stand against this procedure in Southeast Asia, signalling the growing concerns of the Catholic Church on the matter; they required proof that the catechumens were ready for baptism and could demonstrate their faith, their consent, and their

¹⁵ For an overview, see Strathern 2007, 113-20.

contrition over their past sins.¹⁶ Overall, the Church strove to develop a teaching system that could support a religious change that came closer to its expectations by focusing on the liturgical forms of rites (Prosperi et al. 1998, 22). With time, this stance would heighten the necessity to strive for “converts of quality”, even in missionary reports. Mass baptism was an instance that brought to light the tensions that characterised the concept of conversion. Baptism was meant to operate as a channel for grace and was not correlated to the convert’s knowledge of the articles of faith. It made a person a Christian but not necessarily a Christian who knew the tenets of Christianity well; while in Europe there were also many Christians considered such “in name only”, this tension put the ideological structure that upheld the idea of mission under stress.

Mass baptism was not a new phenomenon to the Society of Jesus in Asia: for example, in 1545, guided by Xavier, in one month the Jesuits baptised more than 10,000 Indian people (Abé 2011, 84-5). Group conversions were also common in Japan and generally took place with the support of the local authorities.¹⁷ Missionaries Vilela, Almeida, Organtino, Frois, Cabral, and Japanese Brother Juan Torres, were all advocates of this practice. Before the superiorate of Cabral, when the mission started to grow quickly in numbers, there had been some instances of mass baptism: they include Antonio and Juan Koteda, who led the baptisms on the island of Hirado, and two noblemen of the area of Miyako who are indicated with the names of Yamashiro and Geki (López-Gay 1966, 94-6). However, mass baptisms became a distinctive feature of Japanese Christianity under Cabral’s guidance. An early example is the conversion of Amakusa Shigehisa (Dom Miguel) in 1571, which prompted the baptism of his family and the workers of his fief.¹⁸ This event might have cemented Cabral’s idea that “the [Japanese] lords were [the] best apostles” (JapSin 9, I, 20). His correspondence did not make a secret of the daimyō’s wish to attract the carracks of the Portuguese to their ports and benefit from the trade with Macao. In the same year, he wrote to the General:

16 Tara Alberts 2013, 134-5. Spanish Jesuit José d’Acosta, too, extensively critiqued the Franciscans’ approach to the mass conversion of the Indians in South America. Still, his own brethren were operating in a similar manner in India, finding justification in the practices of the primitive Church. Acosta’s debate was brought to Japan by the Franciscans, and repeated by Valignano against them (Correia 2001, 101-2).

17 For examples, see Abé 2011, 166.

18 Amakusa Shigehisa (?-1582) was the head of one of the five families that governed Amakusa in southern Kyushu. His family was a strong supporter of the Christian presence and facilitated the conversion of the other warrior families. His brother Tanemoto (Dom André) and his son Hisatane (Dom João) were baptised, respectively, in 1571 and 1576, after which his domain underwent complete Christianisation (Turnbull 2012, 196-7; Elisonas 1997, 333).

The main reason why these lords want the Law of God and the Fathers in their lands is their temporal interests. [Those who have these interests are] particularly the ones who have harbours, where the carracks can enter, bring [money from] the concessions and frequent visits of merchants, and enrich their lands; and some who live in the interior, who want the Fathers to favour them in the trade and in things that are related to the carracks, so they desire to have them in their land and request them. (JapSin 7, I, 20v)

Mass baptism went hand in hand with the cultivation of relationships with important political players, something Cabral devoted himself to. In this, the missionaries followed the example of Francis Xavier and his understanding that the protection of the daimyō was needed to preach successfully.

Cabral's hopes in the daimyō started coming to fruition in 1574, when Ōmura Sumitada began the conversion of his fief in Kyūshū. He had been baptised with the name Dom Bartolomeu in 1563, as the first major sengoku daimyō to do so. He wished then to have the Macanese carracks come to his port of Yokoseura, but he had subsequently faced attacks from his neighbours and rebellion in his lands. He spent the following years regaining his territories with the support of Portuguese weapons. To cement their alliance, he ordered the Christianisation of his domain: it is estimated that the total number of converts amounted to 35,000 people. Some of them had previously been Buddhist monks, who then often transformed their temples into churches and maintained spiritual leadership over them and their communities.¹⁹

Dom Bartolomeu was not the only sengoku daimyō who had his domains converted to Christianity during Cabral's superiorate. Takayama Ukon (Dom Justo), baptised in 1563, ordered the conversion of his newly acquired fief of Takatsuki (Ōsaka) in 1574.²⁰ Arima Yoshisada (Dom André, 1521-76) also saw that, in the few months between his conversion and his death, 20,000 people of his domain were baptised. Ōtomo Yoshishige was baptised in 1578, and in his domain of Bungo, mass conversion was also common.²¹

19 Elison 1988, 90-2; Higashibaba 2001, 14-15. Frois' version of the events posits that Gaspar Coelho, the local Jesuit, was simply allowed to preach freely in the domain and that the locals to whom he talked, due to their "natural intelligence" ("naturalmente [...] de vi-vo engenho"), proceeded to burn down a nearby temple (*Historia*, 2: 424-5).

20 On this influent Christian daimyō, see Laures 1942.

21 See additional examples in Higashibaba 2001, 15; Elisonas 1997, 333; Miyazaki 2003, 7.

4.4 Mass Baptism and its Anxieties

If, therefore, becoming a Catholic Christian was a long process that needed to be followed and encouraged throughout the life of the convert (Ballériaux 2016, 47; 64), then baptism did not need to be preceded by very extensive teaching. Even in the event that it produced unsatisfactory Christians, at least it provided a chance to avoid eternal damnation, something they would be condemned to if they had not been baptised at all (Strathern 2007, 115). A pervasive belief of the missionaries was that, even if the first generation of converts would be forced into the faith, subsequent ones would be more familiar with its practices, and therefore be Christians of better quality. This logic could easily help justify mass baptism in many missions. It is also why, in Japan, the Jesuits strove to follow their communities closely, fostering their religious practices and taking upon themselves the work that in a different situation would have been for the secular clergy. Indeed, they expressed surprise when a community left to itself for many years was discovered still maintaining the faith. Therefore, it was standard practice to try to provide a basic evangelical preparation for all catechumen, before or after baptism proper. For example, a sixteenth-century Franciscan list, compiled in Mexico, called for the knowledge of these articles of faith as required:

a single omnipotent God, eternal, all-good and all-knowing, the creator of everything; the holy virgin; the immortality of the soul; the demons and their perfidies. (Strathern 2007, 115)

The anxiety that surrounded the practice of mass baptism can be evinced in the writings of the Japanese mission, where it was particularly acute. As mentioned above, the Jesuits considered the Japanese as particularly rational people. When, in their writings, rational acceptance of the tenets of Christianity was compared to other evangelising methods, it emerged as the best option (López-Gay 1966, 89). The purported superiority of the Japanese over other extra-European people, therefore, attributed them a higher potential to become good Christians. This was the reason behind the Jesuit missionaries' identification of Japan as the "most profitable" of all their missions.²²

This positive depiction of Japanese people, however, jarred with the mechanics of the mass baptisms that were taking place in the country, eventually becoming a cause of tension. If the Japanese had so much potential, why was there a need for compromises with tools of conversion that were held to be inferior to rational persuasion? The

²² While the same idea emerges in different forms throughout the history of Jesuit presence in Japan, this definition was given at the 1580 General Consultation in Bungo (López-Gay 1966, 90).

missionaries attempted to smooth over this contradiction by pointing to the need to adapt to Japanese culture and thus framing their policy of top-down conversions as an accommodation. They insisted that it would lead to successful conversions because it was a practice understood by and common among the people of Japan. Among the purported characteristics of Japanese society that were given as an explanation for the strategies of conversion that were being used was the control the daimyō had over religious matters in his domain, which made his patents necessary. Additionally, the total obedience of the inferior towards the superior, which in turn made people favour the opinion of the daimyō, allowed him to directly impose Christianity on the common people. This devotion of the Japanese and the great power held by the daimyō were both aspects that were underlined time and time again by the missionaries trying to defend the practice to their superiors in Europe (López-Gay 1966, 91-4). I would argue that these recurring apologetics also highlight an undercurrent of uncertainty that surrounded mass baptisms.

Another matter that emerges at the centre of this discussion on mass baptisms is the priority of expanding the number of the converts versus the catechisation of those already baptised. This was not a problem unique to Japan; some missions, such as those of Latin America, suffered fierce internal debates on which practice deserved precedence (Broggio 2004). These controversies depended on different interpretations of the process of conversion and were aggravated by a chronic lack of resources: missions often struggled to sustain these two activities that supported conversions. Under Valignano, after a prolonged period of debate, the expansion of Christendom was given priority in Japan.²³ Unfortunately, the *Acta* of the Consultations when these resolutions were taken do not provide the opinions of specific missionaries on this question, as they do for some others. They are limited to a mention of long debates on the topic, with reasons for and against territorial expansion. Even if Cabral's opinion in the matter was not made explicit, the importance that he placed on trusting Divine Providence suggests he had a hand in, or at least supported, the fourth reason in favour of expansion: "to stop [it] only for the fear of costs and lack of workers is to lack faith in Divine Providence" (JapSin 2, 7v-9r). Even if

23 The reasons behind this decision, as discussed in the 1581 Nagasaki Consultation, were: even if there are too few workers to properly follow all converts, a weak Christian can always find help for salvation, while a gentile cannot; there are too few Christians, and they live mixed with the gentiles which makes them lose fervour, so the only way to help them is to increase their numbers; even though there are many costs related to the expansion, with time Japanese Christianity will be able to sustain itself; to stop the expansions only for the fear of costs and lack of workers is to lack faith in divine Providence; based on experience, the more the number of Christians grows, the more the reputation of Christianity grows, and with it the number of (Japanese) workers (López-Gay 1966, 24-5).

an agreement was reached in the end, the fact that the topic was the object of long discussions suggests that the approach that favoured expansion still caused uneasiness.

Cabral, therefore, appears accepting of the missionary policy implemented by Xavier and speaks of it in positive or neutral terms. When discussing these events, his focus is often on the elite person whose conversion has led the others. He creates narratives of God's grace triumphing over the sinful nature of humankind, the divine element being the only active force present:

We went to another fortress of [Amakusa Shigehisa], where he usually resides; after being here for two or three months without doing anything (because the dishonest [captain of the fortress of Hondo] together with some monks hindered us), when we had lost hope, after suffering much cold and labours, it pleased God Our Lord [that] the lord became Christian, with nearly all the other people of the fortress and others.²⁴

The elements of the narrative that Cabral favours appear starkly when compared to the same event as it appears in the *Historia*:

During this time, Father Francisco Cabral was already superior of Japan and visited Amakusa-dono many times, until [the latter] was completely sure and, having understood the things of God, asked the Father to be baptised. The Father did so, giving him the name Dom Miguel, and with him were baptised a couple of relatives of his. (*Historia*, 2: 230)

Although both have edifying purposes and downplay the group baptism aspect, these two retellings focus on different aspects of the conversion of Dom Miguel. Cabral highlights the intervention of divine grace when the missionaries thought all was lost; Frois accentuates the intellectual process of the catechumen, who, after understanding the "things of God", asks for baptism. The number of his retinue members who followed him into the new religion is also downplayed by Frois and centred on the elite instead of the inhabitants of the fortress.

While not necessarily conflicting, the two narratives could not be more different in their presentations of the workings of conversion. These differences highlight a necessity, in the text that was supposed

²⁴ Francisco Cabral to Juan Batista [de Ribera], Kuchinotsu, 23 September 1571, in JapSin 7, III, 37r. This is one of the many Italian manuscript copies extant of this letter; the Portuguese version in EVORA might be closer to the (lost?) original when, at the end of the paragraph, it adds: "after [the conversion of Amakusa Shigehisa], many places became Christian" (EVORA, 310r).

to become the official recounting of the history of the mission, to present the events so that they catered more closely to sensibilities that Cabral seems to ignore.²⁵ In these elements, it is possible to detect the influence of the controversy on missionary methods with the Franciscans in the writing of the *Historia*, which appears more concerned about the will and preparation of the catechumen, as well as the need to confirm them explicitly. Both these elements are lacking in Cabral's text. In the latter, coherently with its author's beliefs on the mechanics of conversion, God's grace is the only important actor, and its influence reaches "nearly all" the inhabitants of the fortress, after touching their lord.

The strategy used by Cabral to support his case for mass baptism is similar to the one he employed to discuss Jesuit garments. He refers to the specificities of Japanese culture in order to contextualise, explain, and justify how the Society of Jesus was operating in Japan. As he explains the political situation of the country in relation to religion, as he perceives it,²⁶ he also presents himself as an authority on the subject, thanks to his status as an eyewitness. As he describes the manner in which common people follow the orders of their daimyō when it comes to affiliating or disaffiliating with Buddhist schools, he writes:

I saw this well, thanks to the experience I accumulated in some place where I was this year, where Our Lord did much fruit in the conversions. (JapSin 7, I, 20r)²⁷

The mission-wide acceptance of the practice of mass baptism enabled Cabral to skip the collection and presentation of additional evidence to support his claim. He deemed that stating his experience was sufficient, regardless of the fact that he had been in Japan for little more than a year at this stage. He attributes this behaviour of the Japanese to the poverty of their country, which makes farmers entirely dependent on the land provided by their daimyō, to the point that "they do not know any other god" (JapSin 7, I, 20v). However, according to Cabral, this could also impose severe limitations on evangelisation:

25 Ironically, of the two texts, in the end it was Cabral's letter that was printed and distributed through Europe (*EVORA*, 1: 309v-311r), while the *Historia* was never published in Frois' time.

26 Cabral is often too simplistic in his descriptions of Japanese politics (López-Gay 1966, 93).

27 Correctly, López-Gay notes that Cabral had been in Japan only a year, in 1571, making his insistence on his direct experience quite a stretch (López-Gay 1966, 94n92).

It is enough that the lord orders them to hear preaching, for everybody to immediately become Christian; on the other hand, if somebody has heard the things of God and, enlightened by them, desires extremely to be Christian, they ask me to obtain the licence from the lords, and without it they declare they cannot [be Christian]. And even this licence is not enough, if they are not sure that the lord was at ease with it. (JapSin 7, I, 20v)

Despite how peculiar and unpredictable this procedure might have appeared, Cabral either believed that sometimes it had good outcomes, or felt compelled to frame it so. Even if the majority of Japanese farmers abandon Christianity when ordered to do so, “among them there are always some chosen ones who prefer to lose their farm and their lives before renouncing [it]” (JapSin 7, I, 20v). Mass baptisms, therefore, seemed to be a functional strategy even when the same powers that initially backed it happened to withdraw their support.

4.5 Exemplary Poor Christians

Even if Cabral was accepting this situation as a reality of the missionary field, in certain occasions he still appears critical of the conversions obtained through this approach, mostly because they were applicable just to the lower socio-economical class:

Very easily they order the lowly people (*jente baixa*) to become Christians and with difficulty they allow the elite (*honrados*) to do it. This is because the common people, when ordered to leave Christianity, leave it. Instead, it is more difficult to make the honoured ones go back, since they generally have a better understanding of the things of God, and accept them more deeply, and it is also for them a point of honour. For these reasons, the lords give licence to the elite with difficulty, and to the lowly born with ease. (JapSin 7, I, 20v)

This paragraph sheds light on Cabral's opinion of the common people as converts of inferior quality. Mass conversions are thus described as less stable in nature than those of the upper classes, not displaying a rooted understanding of the faith nor an ability to resist in it. Cabral identifies better catechumens, who live up to the expectations set for “the best people ever discovered” in the upper classes, to whom he attributes a deeper understanding of Christian tenets for both natural and cultural causes. He appears to distance himself from mass conversions whenever possible, leaving them to the care of other Jesuits, to dedicate his efforts towards the elites or areas not

yet reached by evangelisation.²⁸ Attesting to Cabral's dissatisfaction with the situation is how little space he dedicates to the actual mass conversions. Still, he had frequent contact with lower-class converts during his travels for visitations. His narrations of these travels contain various pages illustrating the conversions and piety of extraordinary lowly-born Japanese. These Japanese assume the role of the *casos particulares* that Ananya Chakravarti identifies in the annual Jesuit letters from Brazil and India. She defines them as

edifying examples to lend color to the dry accounting of mission activity—the numbers of baptisms and catechumens which the missions conscientiously reported. (Chakravarti 2013, 516)

These “special cases” thus brought more edification to the readers (and, I would argue, to the writer as well) and provide a sketch of Jesuit ideas on conversion at that time. However, even making for a consoling read, the existence and activities of these exemplary Christians opened a second front in Cabral's difficulties with the Japanese mission.

The 1574 letter to the General, written on 31 May in Miyako, presents numerous instances of Christians whom Cabral met in his second visitation to the capital that year. The Christian community of Yamaguchi, which had suffered persecutions and had been left on its own since the time of Xavier, presents an interesting case to illustrate the expectations of the missionaries. Mass conversion was supported in part by the belief that subsequent generations would produce better Christians, since they were raised “in the faith”. In this scenario, key roles were played by the support of the community and the guidance of the priests. Lacking these, the missionaries were therefore expecting that the Christians of Yamaguchi had returned to their old religious conduct, just as those in Hakata (Fukuoka) had done: they compared this latter city, without the teachings of a missionary, to “an untamed forest” (JapSin 7, II, 208v).²⁹ Instead, Yamaguchi provided a trove of exemplary converts, as Cabral writes at length about the many pious Christians he found there. While it is not possible to discuss all his edifying examples, some are particularly interesting for the framing and comments he provides to their stories. The first is Catarina:

28 An example is the conversion of the fief of Ōmura, which he leaves to carry out the baptism of the second son of Ōtomo Sorin (JapSin 8, I, 73r; see next section for more details).

29 This is an image that contrasts with the ideal of mission as the “vineyard of the Lord”, as the edited text makes explicit (*Lettere del Giappone*, 6).

I found here an old woman who is eighty years old and lives a league away from the city of Yamaguchi, in a village called Miya-no where there are a hundred, or a hundred and fifty Christians. This old woman, called Catarina, converted most of them, and both gentiles and Christians believe her to be saintly, and I believe it too. (JapSin 7, II, 210rv)

The letter then proceeds to describe the devotion of this woman, who came to Mass before sunrise, even with the snow, the cold, and the dangers of the wolves, and had scruples about falling asleep after her morning prayers. The reader is given to understand that Cabral, who had thought he was doing a great sacrifice getting up in the cold to pray, was very surprised and humbled to find her already in the church to hear Mass (JapSin 7, II, 210v).

The second example from Yamaguchi is Maria, also baptised by Xavier. She was the only Christian of her village, situated just outside the city:

Truly in her I saw how much better catechised are those whom God catechises with his grace and the light of faith, than those whom we catechise through preaching and natural reasons. This woman only had sixty measures of rice, and she gave them to us to do with them what was best for her soul, and returned to her village without even knowing the Pater Noster well, nor the Ave Maria. [However,] in twenty days she came back with a *kojimoto*,³⁰ who is the head and preacher in a sect called Ikkō-shū [...] and another three, [...] whom she converted. After hearing preaching and being baptised, they went back with her. (JapSin 7, II, 211r)

The letter proceeds to list and describe with many details cases of Japanese converts bringing others to the faith and maintaining their own through difficulties, despite the lack of guidance.

Through these examples, Cabral wished to illustrate the way in which God operated on the souls of the converts, regardless of the work, or even presence, of missionaries. This includes considerations on the efficacy of baptism in the absence of a priest. An ex-monk called João, for example, had led some people whom he had converted to the Jesuits to receive additional teachings and then baptism. Since not all of them could leave their town, Cabral taught João how to perform baptisms so that he could do it himself. A similar case happened when travelling towards Yamaguchi:

30 "People running an ikkō-shū dōjō in the general area of Western Japan", (Kinryū 2006, 77).

I understood from a Christian called Jacobo [...] that in a nearby kingdom [...] there was a Christian, baptised by Father Master Francis [Xavier]. As he was the only Christian present in that kingdom, he still persevered with great faith. Knowing that Jacobo was a Christian, [...] he sent his son to see him and beg him to tell a Father [...] that he was a Christian, and so were those of his house, although not baptised yet because there was nobody who could do it. Since he desired much their baptism [...] as that kingdom was very far, I asked Jacobo [...] to console him and baptise his family. For this, I had him *write down* the baptismal formula and I taught him how to baptise them.³¹

Baptism was a sacrament that could be taught and performed by anyone.³² However, the fact that the 1578 printed edition of this letter excised the passage that suggested a hasty teaching of the formula to what amounted to a virtuous but otherwise unprepared Japanese Christian suggests that this practice was not seen in a positive light, or at least not considered ideal. Indeed, in 1598, the mission was accused of laxity regarding baptisms; by the end of the following century, the ecclesiastical authorities of Asia had put the practice under strict control, making the presence of a priest necessary for a proper performance of the ritual (López-Gay 1966, 146-53; Alberts 2013, 134). These examples illustrate how Cabral could not afford to be touched by this type of concern about the form and administration of the sacraments. He worked in a decade in which they were not yet prevalent and also lacked the manpower to answer all the requests for baptism the mission received, as he often lamented. In this case, when he could, he baptised the neophytes himself after meeting them on the road; otherwise, he allowed them to be baptised without even seeing them, as long as they had expressed the desire for baptism. The fact that Cabral entrusted people external to the Society with the task shows that he was not merely performing an exercise in rhetoric when he wrote that he believed that grace would intervene when human means failed.

Although Cabral was adept at the use of *casos particulares* in his letters, a certain current of uneasiness can be detected in his words. While successful in heightening the edifying effect of his letters, the way he described these episodes suggests that not all was as well as he wanted to portray. For example, after his 1574 list of special converts, he notes:

³¹ Cabral to the General, Miyako, 31 May 1574, in JapSin 7, II, 209v; Emphasis added, on the part expunged in an Italian printed edition (*Lettere del Giappone*, 9-10).

³² Among the Jesuit literature produced in Japan, there was a booklet with instructions on how to conduct baptisms (López-Gay 1966, 145).

In truth when I see what God Our Lord operates through these Christians, and how one who has converted today, tomorrow is converting others without even knowing the prayers, on the one hand I am very consoled, on the other very confused. I am very consoled to hear how God Our Lord communicates with these poor, humble, simple Christians who, removed yesterday from gentility and their idolatries, with the grace received in the holy baptism, today they already are preachers of the greatness of God. We should not receive small consolation from this, because we clearly saw how much God Our Lord remembers and cares for these souls of Japan: He supplements the lack of Fathers and Brothers who can take care of them in the church, taking these simple and poor as the preachers of his Gospel. (JapSin 7, II, 212v)

The devotion of these model Japanese Christians and their combined accomplishment in converting other Japanese are framed as a direct divine intervention on the field and as proof of God's favour towards them. However, the way Cabral describes them, while acting as a reminder that God helps the underprivileged, also stresses their ignorance in the matters of faith: they were "removed yesterday from gentility and their idolatries", they do not even know the prayers. This could be just a rhetorical statement to show the enormous power of grace and make the Japanese's newfound piety more striking by comparison, but the passage that follows immediately after suggests that the central issue is the Japanese Christians' ability to convert others regardless of their knowledge, experience, or spiritual prowess. Cabral strove to put a positive spin on it, attributing their newfound capacity to a divine intervention to supplement the lack of European preachers, but the explicit comparison that follows reveals how the situation was slowly creating tension around his own role as missionary. Indeed, before continuing to discuss the general state of the Yamaguchi mission, Cabral explains the second part of his opening statement, that is, his bewilderment:

It confounds me greatly to see how a Catarina from Miyano, or a Maria of Mine, or any of these poor Christians, simple and humble, is well capable, with unpolished, badly composed words, to move the hard hearts of the gentiles. And [on the other hand] with many efficient and well-composed reasonings, I manage at most to make them admit that [Christianity] is a good thing, and they go away gentile and unmoved just like they were before. (JapSin 7, II, 212v)

The edifying objective of this paragraph is to show the writer as rightly chastened, reminded of his own human limits. However, the way it is presented raises doubts as to how much Cabral was humbled and

edified, and how much he was, instead, starting to lose hope in the face of his own ineffectiveness.

Cabral's lack of success is illustrated in detail soon after, in an event that "scared him and made him understand clearly of what little use preaching is if God does not move" (JapSin 7, II, 213r) the hearts of the listeners. The missionaries organised, as a final attempt to make converts, a whole week of preaching; the weather was miserable, but many gentiles came to hear the sermons. They are explicitly described as enjoying it very much and listening attentively; the attendance was such that they could not fit in the church. Their feedback was so positive that Cabral thought they would all convert, but in the end, "only two men became Christians, and all the others remained as gentile as they had been before" (JapSin 7, II, 213r). Not even the hardship suffered through the subsequent strenuous travelling towards Sakai appeared to gain the missionaries any merit. After Cabral fell very sick, the group risked being killed for preaching, were attacked by pirates, and only then did they manage to take shelter in the Christian community of Sakai. What should be the ensuing triumph, twenty-four new converts, was perhaps rather meagre when Cabral compared it to the previous adversities. The implicit rhetorical point of glorious suffering for Christ is not followed by its expected consequence of tangible success.

These portrayals of the workings of grace underscore not just the importance attributed to it in the narratives of conversion, but the inability of the missionaries to understand or influence them, as well. Such interpretations of events thus risked jeopardising the "quid-pro-quo" understanding of the relationship between human actions and grace that, as demonstrated by the debacle on the black cassock, influenced Cabral's approach to evangelisation. The confidence he initially displayed regarding his work, in time, disappeared from his correspondence and was substituted with a pervasive confusion that is addressed explicitly only on occasions. These later letters are characterised by a difficulty of mapping grace's interventions, or lack thereof: some Japanese converted when the missionaries had lost hope (as in the case of Amakusa Shigehisa), some did not embrace Christianity regardless of Cabral's efforts, and some nurtured their relationship with God by themselves and brought others to the faith. As will be considered in the next section, the first cases could be interpreted as a sign of divine favour in response to Jesuit exertion, and the second could be justified with a negative interpretation of Japanese nature (e.g., "gentile and unmoved"). However, it was the third group, composed mostly of exemplary Christians, who seemed to be the most difficult for Cabral to justify, as they provided a living example of maintaining hope in the face of adversity. Upon returning to the man whose family had been baptised by Jacobo, Cabral wrote:

I received his [letter] of three or four pages, where, after many thanks, he recounted his life, his labours [210r] and the persecutions he suffered. Truly this letter seemed to me as coming from a very spiritual holy man, instead of a Christian who had not been nurtured, and I clearly understood how much closer God is to the humble, who search Him with faith and simplicity, than He is to a superb person *like me*, who believed I had already found Him.³³

Even allowing a rhetorical aspect to the latter declaration and its value as a practice of contrition, I would argue that Cabral is concerned, as he expresses his growing perception of God as distant from himself: God is “much closer to [this Japanese man] than He is... to... me”. This perception might be amplified by Cabral’s own praising of the intervention of grace on the Japanese, a recurring trope in his writings. The importance of his missionary work is weakened by the text itself; it highlights how much less efficient human evangelisation was compared to the divine. Identifying God as the only source of any success obtained, in an effort to bring about edification from both the divine action and the humility of the missionaries’ efforts. This was generally intended, but it was rhetoric that risked working against the activities of the mission. Moreover, the narrative of the cases of Catarina and Maria states explicitly that even unlearned Japanese women could be more efficient channels of grace than Cabral himself. In this manner, the spiritual excellence and effectiveness attributed to the exemplary Christians jeopardised Cabral’s status as a missionary, in his own eyes.

4.6 Catechising Elite Christians

When the occasion arose, Cabral was keen to spend long passages on the conversion of elite Japanese. For instance, he started the letter written on 9 September 1576 by updating the General about the conversion of the fief of Ōmura Sumitada.³⁴ Although the operation was a major success when measured in numbers of new Christians,³⁵ the focus of the letter was one single, unrelated person: the second son of Ōtomo Sōrin, Ōtomo Chikaie (1561-1641). Cabral nar-

³³ Cabral to the General, Miyako, 31 May 1574, in JapSin 7, II, 209v-210r; emphasis added, on the parts excised in *Lettere del Giappone*, 10.

³⁴ Cabral to the General, Kuchinotsu, 9 September 1576, in JapSin 8, I, 73r-82r (a note on the manuscript dates it erroneously 6 June 1577).

³⁵ The Jesuits count 15,000 converts, to be added to the 20,000 of the previous year (JapSin 8, I, 73r).

rates how he personally oversaw the catechisation of the newly converted Dom Sebastião, whose allegiance improved the standing of Christianity among the people of Bungo, leaving behind its association with poverty and sickness that derived from the presence of the Jesuit hospital. These events are presented as very edifying and reveal the hope that Chikaie might be an influential asset for Christianity and evangelisation in the future.³⁶ In comparison, little space is dedicated to the 15,000 new converts in the fief of Ômura. Although the strategy of top-down evangelisation did not necessarily include the conversion of a daimyō and his family to be effective, since obtaining their favour was generally enough, the baptism of the elites was an important step to guarantee a future for Christianity in the fief. It has already been shown that Cabral considered these upper-class conversions as superior in both quality and stability; it follows that he wished to supervise the elite's catechisation in person, whenever possible, and was keen on it being more exhaustive than that of the lower classes.³⁷

If it differed in length and effort, in this period the catechisation of all Japanese people was in theory carried out through the same catechism; the Jesuits' insufficient knowledge of the Japanese language meant that they were generally dependent on a dōjuku to carry out the teachings, especially towards those who had not yet been baptised. No copy of the didactic composition used in the 1570s, often referred to as "Cabral's catechism", is still extant in its entirety.³⁸ This text was modified a number of times during that decade and was circulating in different versions of varying length to adapt to the depth of the catechisation needed by the catechumens (Valignano 1954, 140*).³⁹ Regardless of these varying redactions, the text was probably dependent on the *Doutrina Cristã* by Marcos Jorge, which had been translated into Japanese in 1568 and was printed by the Christian Press in 1591 as *Dochirina Kirishitan* (Higashibaba 2001, 57).⁴⁰ A polished version of the 1570s catechism, in Japanese written in Latin

36 "Because everything on this shore depended on [Chikaie's father]" (JapSin 8, I, 73r).

37 Unsurprisingly, this was a common practice for the duration of the mission, although it seems Cabral dedicated even less time to the lower classes than average (López-Gay 1966, 42-3).

38 José Luís Álvares-Taladriz shows how some of this catechism survived as passages of the 1586 *Catechismus Christianae Fidei*. In a rather surprising statement that was mostly ignored by subsequent Western historiography, Álvares-Taladriz measures Cabral's and Valignano's contributions to the *Catechismus* as approximately equal (Valignano 1954, 141*). However, it has now become impossible to identify which parts were taken specifically from "Cabral's catechism".

39 Adapting catechisation to the social status and perceived ability of the catechumens was a common practice in Asia (López-Gay 1966, 42).

40 On the use of Jorge's *Doutrina Cristã* in Japan, see Pinto dos Santos 2016.

characters, is referenced in 1578, when Brother Juan Torres used it to catechise Ōtomo Sōrin and his last wife, Justa (*Historia*, 3: 15-16).

The content of these instructions was similar to those imparted later to the Ōtomo heir, Yoshimune, who also expressed his interest in Christianity and requested Torres for himself and his wife. The topics considered in this instance can be inferred from the discussion they generated: “at the end of the preaching, [Yoshimune] asked questions on the doubts he had, both about the matter of the soul, and its immortality, and about the creation of the angels, and about most topics he had heard”.⁴¹ Another day, he heard from Cabral and Frois about “the deceits of the Laws of Japan, and the falsities of the Kami and Buddha, and of the truth, justice, and integrity of the Law of God”, which they read from either the 1570s catechism in one of its late forms or an auxiliary text (*Historia*, 3: 15n11).⁴² While no Japanese translation of this text seems to have survived,⁴³ a fragment of the Portuguese manuscript is still extant, written in the hand of Frois. The production of a collaborative effort between the dōjuku, the European missionaries, and their Japanese informants,⁴⁴ the fragment is comprised of 20 pages (Fondo Gesuitico 724/3, third document).⁴⁵ Its contents, similar to those mentioned by Yoshimune, suggests that it was used for the catechisation of the elites, as does its complexity. The surviving section describes at length the creation of the world, the soul and its immortality, and the creation of Adam, plus a missing section that must have discussed the original sin; the manuscript then resumes with the creation and fall of the angels and how this led to the creation of Japanese religions, behind which was identified as the work of the Devil.

The catechism was therefore an attempt to concretely support the Jesuits' efforts to understand Japanese religions and refute them. The approach is tailored to the higher ability to understand the faith rationally, which was attributed to the elites. However, the importance Cabral attributed to the connection between the actions of the Jesu-

⁴¹ Luís Frois to the Fathers and Brothers of the Society of Jesus in Portugal, Usuki, 16 October 1578, in EVORA, 426r.

⁴² Frois might be making a distinction between Cabral's catechism and this auxiliary work when he calls it a “treatise” that will be translated together with the catechism (EVORA, 426v). Cabral does not seem to differentiate the two works when, in 1574, he mentions the text composed with the help of Kenzen João, which “not only contained the mysteries of our Holy Faith, but also negated punctually the books of Japan [i.e., Buddhist sutra] and showed their lies” (JapSin 7, II, 209r).

⁴³ Cabral and Frois were certainly reading from a Japanese copy in Latin characters, as Yoshimune later requested one to be made into “Japanese letters” (EVORA, 426v).

⁴⁴ Such as Kenzen João, who provided the missionaries in Miyako, among whom Frois, with information about the Lotus Sutra (Valignano 1954, 139*).

⁴⁵ A transcription has been published in *Historia*, 4: 542-64.

its and divine favour towards the evangelisation of Japan reappears in this passage describing his reaction to receiving news of Yoshimune's interest:

So that [Yoshimune's conversion] could be better obtained, Father Francisco Cabral immediately ordered to the dearest Fathers and Brothers of Funai, and of this residence of Usuki, to say masses, and to do special prayers, disciplines, and fasting. (*EVORA*, 426r)

As he had done previously, Cabral hoped to enlist God's assistance with sacrifices of various kinds. He also looked for and interpreted signs of Providence in the world. Still, it is possible to detect a shift in the narratives he built around these events. A striking example is the baptism of Chikaie, Yoshimune's younger brother. The fact is reported as being followed by an assorted collection of exorcisms and healings. The standard Catholic interpretation of this event, together with the exemplary behaviour of Chikaie's group of converted young men, should present them as positive signs that God is favouring the work of evangelisation. Cabral's framing of the event tends instead towards bleakness:

I came to feel some bitterness in my spirit, and I declare it my fault, because I feared that many of these conversions were false, and that these neophytes would not be firm in the faith, and in the life they took for themselves. The reason was that I knew that these people of Japan are the most libertine and sensual that I have ever seen. [...] So every time I baptised any of these gentlemen, I always had scruples, because it seemed to me that they did it as a formality, and to enter the good graces of the King, and that they would return to their vomit. Therefore, I would hold them back many days with sermons, describing to them the ugliness of sin, etc. But God our Lord demonstrated well how much more grace can, than the perversion of nature, or than my little faith. Because these courtiers, most of them being between seventeen and twenty-five years old, and very rich, and lords of vassals, and of very bad habits, after receiving the water of the Holy Baptism, they had such a great, and sudden mutation, that they surprised everybody who knew them.⁴⁶

The immediate effect of grace on the convert, implied by Cabral's belief in the effectiveness of mass baptism,⁴⁷ becomes visible in this

⁴⁶ Cabral to the General, Kuchinotsu, 9 June 1576, in *Lettere del Giappone*, 55-6.

⁴⁷ "Mass baptism privileged the salvific potential of the sacrament [of baptism], the fact that the rite made a real and indelible mark on the soul of the convert" (Alberts 2013, 135).

passage, which doubles as another exhortation to the reader to not doubt its power. The virtuosity of the neophytes can be read as a sign that the evangelisation of the country is supported by divine will. The narrative follows a familiar progression: Cabral's attempts to teach the tenets of Christianity to a group of neophytes appear to be a useless endeavour, but the enterprise is saved at the last second by divine intervention, which is followed by portentous signs; Cabral is rightly humbled and declares his sinfulness and then his contrition. While the example of Chikaie's groups does not focus extensively on the work done by Cabral (as did, instead, that of Amakusa Shigehisa), here too appears the suggestion that God has accepted his efforts and repaid them with pious converts, even if Cabral himself lacked (or had lost) hope in the endeavour. The edifying and consolatory interpretation of the events aims to reinforce the belief in Providence, just as the dress debacles did.

However, this same framing allowed Cabral to admit his "little faith" and his low expectations in the ability of the Japanese to behave according to his standards. The text identifies explicitly the cause of this as the bad nature Cabral attributes to the Japanese as a whole. They are "the most libertine and sensual [people] that I have ever seen... they would return to their vomit", he writes, comparing them derogatorily to animals. Years of describing the surprise he felt regarding the virtuous among them did little to ease Cabral's assumptions regarding the low probability of success of evangelisation. Moreover, he accused the elite Japanese of requesting baptism for worldly benefits and not out of belief and will to convert. No similar accusations were made towards the lower classes, for whom it was purportedly acceptable to receive baptism following an ultimatum from their daimyō, justified by the missionaries as something allowed in Japanese culture. It emerges therefore that, by 1576, Cabral is also losing hope for the "genuine" conversion of the upper-class Japanese, whose understanding of Christianity was supposed to be deeper and more solid. Their purportedly perverse nature could be overcome only by divine intervention. In this sense, Cabral's efforts to catechise them are effective just as a sacrifice to God, not to reach their rational understanding. This letter makes explicit the fact that, even if the cases of pious Christians among the elite were not few, he thought of them just as he did of those among the lower classes: exemplary converts, rare examples onto which the focus of his missives could be shifted when he was despairing of his ability to make an impact on the country.

4.7 Conclusion

Because the Japanese mission under Cabral was expanding and there were plenty of new converts, his reports give the impression that he believed that God was not showing particular favour to him. He fell violently ill and feared for his life various times during his travels; he worked hard, preaching for days in the cold but making very few converts. Some of the Japanese Christians displayed amazing piety, against all his predictions. Perhaps most importantly in Cabral's narrative, God seems to favour the newly converted poor as a means to do missionary work instead of the Jesuits. They reportedly barely knew the Pater Noster but still managed to be examples of Christian virtue and bring many others to the faith.

Cabral was careful, in his presentation of the events, to always put a positive spin and to aim for the edification of the general reader (and possibly, by the act of composing the letter, of himself), especially when he wrote to Europe. The descriptions of the exemplary converts help him in this sense. The importance of presenting himself as a humble worker does the same. There is, however, a certain anxiety that appears between the lines of his letters, connected to the uncontrollable way grace operates on the conversions, which leaves doubt behind.

From this point of view, Cabral displays a relationship with grace of the kind that O'Malley describes as "quid-pro-quo". The signs he received after 1573, however, starting with the fateful sinking of the fleet of Visitor Álvares off the port of Nagasaki, did not seem easy to read or understand. With the situation difficult to interpret, Cabral's writing loses certainty. When he arrives in Japan, he frames his actions and his decisions to show his obedience to the orders of Álvares. However, after Álvares' death, Cabral suddenly inherits the guidance of the mission and loses the possibility of simply obeying. In the years that follow, even in the face of the supposed success of his work of conversion, he shows less and less certainty about the rightness of his path. He perceives a change in the way Providence acts, which suggests that God might not be favouring him any longer.

