

A Failing Mission?

Salvation in the Jesuit Mission in Japan Under Francisco Cabral

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5 Jesuit Salvation in Japan

Summary 5.1 Organisational Weakness. – 5.2 External Isolation. – 5.3 Internal Isolation
– 5.4 Abandoning Japan. – 5.5 A Lost Mission and the End of Hope. – 5.6 Conclusions.

A major consideration that informed the previous pages is that early modern mission was considered an efficient tool to save both the soul of the missionary and the souls of those he was converting. Chapter 4 provided an overview of the manner used by the Jesuits during the 1570s to save the souls of other people through conversion and cultivation of the faith among their communities. This chapter will consider the other half of the enterprise, that is, the salvation of the souls of the missionaries themselves; it will also focus on the material solutions that Cabral proposed when it became clear that spiritual means would not be enough to save the mission in his eyes.

Starting in 1573, the conditions of the Jesuits in Japan steadily worsened due to the isolation, both internal and external, that the mission suffered. When Cabral attempted to obtain permission for some projects that, he believed, would have mitigate the mission's problems, he was not able to obtain it, due to the difficulties of lettered governance, and refused to take on himself the responsibility of the reforms and their expenses. The latter half of his stay in Japan was characterised by a general feeling of helplessness, which in turn dragged him into a spiritual crisis. Regardless of the numeric success of the conversions, he felt that God had abandoned the mission and pleaded to be allowed to leave.

This chapter will consider how internal and external elements affecting the mission contributed not only to the administrative failure but also to the personal crisis that Cabral suffered. It will expand upon the organisational weaknesses of the Jesuit mission, the solutions suggested by Cabral, the possible reasons behind his inability to implement them, and the structural collapse that threatened the whole enterprise at the end of the decade. It will then look at Cabral's attempts to save his vow of obedience and, when this failed, to at least save his soul.

5.1 Organisational Weakness

The state of the mission when Valignano arrived in Japan in 1579 was, in his view, very worrying. Writing in 1580 from Usuki to the General, he stated that he felt “sad and disconsolate” to see how the Society of Jesus would certainly “lose itself” (“se yva perder”) in the country if immediate solutions were not implemented.¹ Valignano listed numerous causes that were, in his opinion, behind this imminent collapse. Among other things, he identified Cabral's governing style as a major contributor:

The first [reason for the ruin of the Society in Japan] was the manner of governance, because the totality of the Society and Christendom in Japan was governed by the will of only one, whoever was the Superior of Japan. All the spiritual and temporal rule of the Society was in his hands, and therefore it could easily collapse. [...] There were no houses nor ordered colleges, nor stable and sure rent, nor it was possible to follow the *Constitutions* and the rules, nor was any order of the Institute known [...] It was governed by the sole will of one man, without having any knowledge of the *Constitutions*, nor of the offices of the Provincial or of the Rector, nor of the order of the Probation house, nor other rules. Considering this, it was clear that, with time, the Society would fall into ruin [...] And how could one man by himself care for the necessities of so many residences, assess the expenses and deal with the business, according to his will, especially since everything was mostly governed without consultations and with much arrogance. Due to this, it was already shown, so many and tremendous disorders arose that it was a great grace and mercy of Our Lord that the Society survived until now. (JapSin 8, I, 298r)

¹ Valignano to the General, Usuki, 27 October 1580, in JapSin 8, I, 298r, transcribed in Schütte 1958, 487.

As Valignano described it, the Japanese mission had operated, until his visitation, with a remarkably simple internal structure, to which the *Constitutions* and the rules that applied to a different, more organised reality could barely be applied. This problem of governance was not unique to Cabral's superiorate: the Japanese mission had never undergone a substantial reorganisation of its structure. Therefore, by European standards, it was highly unregulated and displayed little of the Jesuit complex system of regulations that had become common by the end of the generalate of Loyola. This situation stemmed from various reasons. It was partially due to the personal attitude of Xavier, who was often too invested in future projects to support the missions he had founded properly (Županov 2005, 55-6). He also never had the opportunity to see the *Constitutions*, living in a period when charismatic governance of the Society was still common, and he had directed his missions according to the same principles. His successor as head of Japan, Cosme de Torres, was not particularly familiar with the Jesuit way of proceeding, since he had lived among other Society members for only a year while in Goa and then briefly with Xavier in Japan. The abnormalities of the mission under his guidance were such that Torres pronounced his three solemn vows only twelve years after becoming superior, and only his death prevented his recall to India to answer regarding his missionaries' deviation from the norm (Hesselink 2016, 29, 53).

This superficial knowledge of the Jesuit Institute combined with the reduced dimensions of the workforce and the isolation of the mission were all factors that had favoured the underdevelopment of the mission's structure. The superior of the house of Bungo was considered the superior of the whole mission, but he held no precise official position that could, in turn, be supported by the standard advising figures. The absence of institutional locales, other than Jesuit residences, made for a lack of other figures of official relevance. As Valignano pointed out, this caused the concentration of power to be in the hands of the superior. Cosme de Torres' and Cabral's governments suffered the same problem; an individual residence was headed by a single missionary (often the only priest in residence), but the power had always rested in the superior's hands. This facilitated the emergence of despotic behaviours, such as those exhibited by Cosme de Torres, in relation to the brothers who worked with him,² or Cabral's tendencies to pretend absolute obedience.

It was only in 1581, when it was declared a vice province, that the Japanese mission's internal structure of governance was created anew, following the rules of the Society more closely (Costa 2000, 245). Still, considering that Vice-Provincials Francesco Pasio and Valentim

² See Torres' behaviour as described by Melchior Nunes Barreto in 1560 (*DJ*, 2: 259).

Carvalho both faced similar accusations of despotism, it would seem that these reforms were not necessarily efficacious. The lack of organisational evolution of the Japanese mission, which should have taken place during the bureaucratisation of the rest of the Society of Jesus, can be attributed to its distance, both geographical and psychological, from the other Jesuit centres. This isolation was also behind the longer-than-average periods of power for each superior and the resulting concentration of influence in their hands (Costa 1998, 74-5). After 1573, Cabral began realising just how much this isolation was a threat to the Society's existence in the country and confronted his inability to find an adequate response to it.

5.2 External Isolation

Previous chapters have shown how Cabral was devoted to the respect of obedience. This is not surprising, when considering the importance that obedience held in the formulation of salvation for the members of the Society of Jesus. Having exchanged more traditional forms of asceticism for it, following Loyola's will to engage more efficiently with the world, obedience had assumed a key role in helping the Jesuit to exercise the humility necessary to save his soul. Obedience was therefore at the forefront of Cabral's mind, when it came to making decisions. However, the problems of the Japanese mission had long escaped the Goan and Roman headquarters. The last visitation from India (excluding Cabral's) dated back to 1556, with Melchior Nunes Barreto. What doomed Cabral's attempts to obtain support, however, were arguably the serious organisational difficulties suffered by the Indian Province at the beginning of the 1570s. Especially after the death the Provincial, morale was low and there was little interest in matters so distant from India.³ It would take another five years for the intervention in Japan by Valignano, who was the highest Jesuit authority in India after 1574.

One of the problems that Cabral had to face during his stay in Japan was therefore nearly complete isolation from the upper echelons of the Society. Initially, he did not seem to be keeping track of the precise correspondence that the Japanese mission received. He mentioned some letters for Cosme de Torres that had arrived in 1571, including one from Diego Mirão, the Portuguese Assistant.⁴ He also referred to another letter, received in the same year, possibly from

³ See Valignano's 1574 comments on the matter in *DI*, 9: 484.

⁴ Francisco Cabral to Diego Mirão, Nagasaki, 6 September 1571, in *JapSin* 7, I, 23r.

Juan Baptista de Ribera.⁵ The letters coming with the 1573 fleet, if any existed, must have sunk off the coast of Nagasaki. In October 1575, Cabral mentioned receiving written orders from the new Provincial of India, Manuel Teixeira, which suggests he received a missive from him, possibly with the news of the death of Quadros. In the same year, at the beginning of the letter to the General, Cabral wrote:

Even if I have not received an answer in these past years to many letters I sent your way, and it is easy for them to be lost, nevertheless, to not fail to keep my obligation, I write when I have opportunity to do so.⁶

As will be detailed in the sections below, between 1573 and 1576, Cabral was convinced that God was actively punishing the mission, and he interpreted the lack of correspondence as part of such discipline. In 1576, although he received a letter from the Visitor, Cabral still lamented Rome's lack of response: "It has been eight years that, each year, I have always written [letters], through two or three routes [vias], to our past Father General of good memory, Francisco de Borja; I never received any reply until this year of 1576".⁷ It was only in 1577 that a letter from General Mercurian finally reached Japan, and Cabral reported the consolation it brought to him and his brethren, stating it gave them "not a little spirit to push forward the works in this vineyard of the Lord with more fervour".⁸ This letter, brought to Japan by a group of thirteen missionaries sent ahead by Valignano, would not have been an answer to some of Cabral's recent pleas but to those sent in or before 1572.⁹ Since in those years Cabral was still focusing on the problem of dress, this last missive probably did not contain much in the way of orders relating to other policies.

Correspondence formed the backbone of the governance of the Society; it allowed, at least theoretically, the central administration to maintain contact with and guide the various provinces. The observance of holy obedience itself was often based on the works of this network of letters. Cabral's correspondence reveals that, to govern

⁵ Francisco Cabral to Juan Batista [de Ribera?], Kuchinotsu, 23 September 1571, in JapSin 7, III, 36r.

⁶ Francisco Cabral to the General, Yamaguchi, 13 September 1575, in JapSin 7, I, 263r.

⁷ Francisco Cabral to General Everard Mercurian, Kuchinotsu, 21 October 1576, in JapSin 8, I, 12r.

⁸ Francisco Cabral to General Everard Mercurian, Kuchinotsu, 1 September 1577, in JapSin 8, I, 134r.

⁹ In 1580, for example, Cabral mentioned receiving an answer to a 1575 missive (Francisco Cabral to General Everard Mercurian, Kuchinotsu, 30 August 1580, in JapSin 8, I, 283r).

the Japanese mission, he tried repeatedly to make use of the network that connected him to his superiors in India and Europe, regardless of the dangers posed to this manner of management by long distances and frequent shipwrecks. So, following the rules demanding frequent reports, Cabral wrote yearly to Goa and Rome, at least for a period. He was assiduous in this endeavour, particularly when compared with his predecessor, Cosme de Torres. It appears that he either stopped writing to Goa in 1575, after learning of the death of Quadros, or that the missives composed after this date were not forwarded to Europe and are now lost. Cabral wrote at least three times to the Assistant of Portugal,¹⁰ and sometimes to the Visitor, but the bulk of his remaining correspondence was directed to the generals. Nevertheless, it emerges clearly from Cabral's letters that he had lost faith in lettered governance by the end of his tenure in Japan. In 1576, when he received the message from Valignano, Cabral was ready to give up, according to his own writings:

I never received any reply until this year of 1576, even if the matters I wrote about were not of little substance, but important to those of the Society who live here in Japan, and for the growth of these conversions and Christianity. So I was about not to [write anymore] this year, because it seemed to me that either the letters were not reaching [Rome], or that nobody was doing much about these matters because they were not important there. However, this year, through three fathers, the Father Visitor Alessandro Valignano sent us the good news of the election of Your Paternity, and of the care and desire you immediately showed to help these parts. (JapSin 8, I, 12r)

There is a sense of helplessness in these lines, that letter-writing was a useless endeavour and that Cabral felt forsaken by his superiors. The accusation that they had abandoned him is only thinly masked by his allowing that his letters might have been lost ("not reaching Rome"). While Cabral certainly tended to over-dramatise when complaining, the fact that he dared to pen explicitly his protests suggests that the matter had profoundly upset him. He also showed awareness that his hopeless attitude was sinful by expressly repenting of his pessimistic feelings in a later letter.¹¹

The intensity he displayed when he wrote about his state of mind suggests an ongoing feeling of abandonment that preceded its first

¹⁰ Cabral to Diego Mirón, Nagasaki, 6 September 1571, in JapSin 7, I, 23r-24v; to Pedro de Fonseca, Usuki, 4 September 1581, in JapSin 9, I, 23r-24v; and from Kuchinotsu, 30 August 1580, to either of them, in JapSin 8, I, 286r-8v.

¹¹ See Cabral to the General, Kuchinotsu, 12 November 1579, in JapSin 8, I, 231r.

mention in 1575, probably dating back to the death of Álvares. Cabral felt strongly about the accident of the 1573 shipwreck, even as he indulged in a dramatic description of the fact (JapSin 7, I, 166A).¹² He did his rhetorical best to transmit the magnitude of the disaster to the General, strengthening his catastrophic tone with a (thematically relevant) biblical citation that framed the accident as a divine punishment for the sins of the Japanese mission: *judicia dei abissive multa*.

The consequences of the shipwreck were not limited to an economic loss, although it was significant;¹³ it also meant the death of the arriving reinforcements. With eighty churches and many Christians to look after, the nine fathers (*MonJap*, 96) that worked in Japan were simply not enough. At this time, Cabral had already concluded that the Indian mission would not be able to offer support to its Japanese branch, even if the Provincial was willing. Thus, he looked at the General to provide for Japan and implored him to think of the territories “that are asking, with their mouths open, for somebody to break the bread of preaching, when nobody can” (JapSin 7, I, 166Av). The effects of the shipwreck on Cabral’s manner of government can be detected also in the letter’s following section: he asked for a dispensation from the Pope to allow Christian Japanese to marry gentiles.¹⁴ He believed this would greatly help the propagation of Christianity in Japan, notwithstanding the lack of missionaries. The topic is not a new one: Cabral had already mentioned it in 1571.¹⁵ In that letter, though, he left the decision-making to the General, while this time he opted for a direct suggestion. The problem was of significant dimensions: the tradition of the country did not permit people to marry outside their social classes. Due to their small number, the possibility of securing appropriate matches for upper-class Christians was therefore limited if they were to choose only among baptised people; according to the missionaries, if they were not allowed to marry outside of their faith, often, they recanted. Instead, if they were allowed, often their spouse would convert to Christianity. It would therefore have been convenient for evangelisation to obtain this blanket dispensation, concluded Cabral, without having to ask to the bishops in India or Melaka every time the problem arose (JapSin 7, I, 166Av). As he began to consider wider matters in the direction of the mission, Cabral attempted to find mitigations to the isolation

12 See Chapter 2 for an extract.

13 Valignano confirmed this in a letter to Mercurian, Goa, 25 December 1574, in *DI*, 9: 521. In 1578, Cabral put the sum lost in the accident at approximately 12-15,000 cruzados (JapSin 8, I, 203r).

14 Coutinho Silva 2021. Valignano’s wrangling with this problem is discussed in Moran 1993, 110. The Asian context is presented in López-Gay 1964, 45-52.

15 Cabral to the General, Nagasaki, 5 September 1571, in JapSin 7, I, 21v.

from Christian authorities and other Christian communities, which plagued the Japanese mission.

The lack of contact with the headquarters also seems to mean that Cabral did not feel free to implement the policies he desired and considered most important. Although he was responsible for the evangelisation of the country, he did not hold an official leadership role because Japan was not an autonomous vice-province. This left his position ambiguous: not powerful enough to make major decisions and support them economically, but too powerful in relation to the local brethren due to the lack of the appropriate advisors and delegates. An official role may have granted more space for manoeuvring in policymaking, if not necessarily greater efficiency. Accordingly, to implement significant changes, Cabral was keen to obtain permission from the General, at least in his own opinion: Cabral's post-1573 letters are characterised by the repetition of the same problems and requests, which went unanswered time and time again. While the problems remained constant, however, the solutions he proposed often changed, suggesting that he was always reconsidering his views (or second-guessing himself) in light of the new insights he gained working in Japan. A significant example of this tendency is Cabral's conceptualisation of the "college" for the mission, provided in Chapter 3. His hesitation in carrying out his own ideas for improving the situation of the mission can be attributed to several reasons, the most evident being economical and spiritual.

During Cabral's superiorate, the mission was always in dire need of funds, even without having to support any institution of learning and the attached student body. So, it would have been very difficult to maintain a college with the resources available.¹⁶ In theory, 1,000 cruzados were granted by the Portuguese crown; 1,300 cruzados were supposed to come from the rent of four villages in Vasai (India); and finally, there were the profits that came from the silk trade with Macao.¹⁷ However, most of the expected funds were never received, making the preservation of the silk trade all the more central to the survival of the mission. In the years Cabral had been in the country, the Japanese mission appears to have received only a fraction of the rent from the Indian villages, which should have financed the development of the mission.¹⁸ Cabral lamented, in 1577,

16 Cabral mentioned specifically the college when, in 1577, he considered the reasons to petition the King for alms (JapSin 8, I, 136v, translated below).

17 Costa 2000, 238. See also Alden 1996, 351. The trade brought, according to Cabral, around 8-10,000 cruzados (JapSin 8, I, 203r).

18 These details are found in the letter from Cabral to Pedro de Fonseca, in JapSin 9, I, 23rv.

that the Indian mission was using the rent of Vasai for itself (JapSin 8, I, 136v).¹⁹ According to Valignano, on the request of Antonio de Quadros, in 1570, Cabral had sent part of Japan's funds to Goa for safekeeping from the upheavals of the Japanese civil war. However, he came to deeply regret this and "still cries about it nowadays", in Valignano's words, since the college in Goa invested only 5,000 cruzados in lands and kept the remaining 13,000 for its own necessities. Since the rest of Japan's funds had sunk in 1573, the Provincial of India wanted to send them 1,000 cruzados, but upon his death, they were used in Kochi instead. The alms for the mission, as well, were never received in their entirety, even after Cabral's departure. The donations the king of Portugal had sent to Japan were systematically held by the mission of Melaka. In 1583, of the 4,000 cruzados sent by the Pope, only 1,500 arrived in Japan because 2,500 were spent by the Procurator to buy necessities for the college at Goa.²⁰ Overall, the distance of the mission from the rest of the Society made funds practically impossible to obtain from the headquarters in a timely manner, resulting in the implementation of any important policy that required monetary support to stall. This lack certainly represented part of the problem, even if Cabral never mentioned this explicitly in the letters before 1578, arguably fearing being perceived as too antagonistic or disdainful of the vow of poverty.

On the other hand, keeping in mind the centrality of holy obedience in Cabral's spiritual path, it seems plausible that he was also not keen to do anything that might go against the wishes of the General and, by extension, God. To support his suggestions, he often referred to his long experience of the mission field, but he left the final decision to his superior. Cabral frequently looked for (supernatural) confirmation that he was correctly obeying his superiors' will, earthly or divine. The use of admittedly stereotypical expressions such as "[if you] believe it [good] *in Domino*"²¹ in his letters allowed him to underline this urgency on the matter to the General as well. As his correspondence first suggested, and later admitted, he was convinced that the deaths of Álvares and Quadros were a punishment from God. The lack of positive divine signs compounded his conviction that the mission was contaminated by sin, a deeply troubling belief that, if Valignano's early writings from Japan are to be believed, was shared by the mission at large, who perceived that each good development was followed by a disaster of some sort (Schütte 1980,

19 The following year he bitterly accused the college of Goa of damaging the Japanese mission (JapSin 8, I, 203v).

20 Valignano to General Acquaviva, Kochi, 28 October 1583, in *DI*, 12: 852-4.

21 For instance, "So it is necessary that Your Paternity, if believing it [good] *in Domino*, gives the authorisation to build this seminary" (JapSin 7, I, 264v).

I, 295-6). Thus, understanding God as systematically punishing the missionaries, Cabral did not take responsibility for any relevant action. These anxieties framed the stagnation of the mission in the second half of the 1570s, as Cabral's writings showed hints of the major crisis he would suffer in later years. His doubts regarding the suitability of his ideas within the plan of Providence help explain Cabral's insistent suggestions to Rome and his desperation at not receiving replies, and his concomitant passivity when facing important choices can thus be read as symptoms of a wider problem. Cabral was torn between the need to find human means and solutions to propel the mission forward, since Divine Providence did not seem to intervene consistently in his favour, and the fear of the sin of disobedience by accidentally going against his superiors' orders and making decisions that could have initiated a negative change. The result was that economic constraints and a lack of workers prevented the efforts of the mission from developing in a manner that seemed fitting for the great achievements that were foreseen for Japan. However, even if he had enforced various small policy changes, Cabral did not carry out any critical development in the organisation of the mission itself, as Valignano later decried.

5.3 Internal Isolation

Cabral met the arrival of the new missionaries, sent by Valignano, with great relief (JapSin 8, I, 135v). The lack of workers had been a problem in his mind since at least 1573, forcing him to dissimulate with undesirable Jesuits to keep them working in the mission.²² In 1575, at the height of his feeling of abandonment by his superiors, he linked the low numbers of missionaries to the general lack of efficiency of the enterprise, both on an earthly level and on a spiritual one:

Many kingdoms ask to be visited by preachers of the law of God, but I can only reply with tears and pain, seeing so many souls being lost for the lack of [those] who might help them. I recall Jeremiah's words, "Young children beg for bread, but no one gives them any" [*Lam.* 4:4]. [...] I will at least implore you, for the wounds of Jesus Christ our Lord, to send workers to this vineyard, where so great a harvest is made. There are so few [workers] here, and they are regularly scattered everywhere, generally alone, and far away from one another, because in Japan there are sixty-six kingdoms.

²² In 1573, the Jesuits in Japan amounted to nine fathers and nine brothers; they grew to a total of 20 in 1576, and more than doubled the following year. In 1578, they were 50, and by the time Cabral left Japan in 1582, they totalled 75 missionaries (Costa 1998, 646-8). For a detailed list of the missionaries present in Japan, see Costa 1999, 22-4.

This cannot be not detrimental to our spiritual gain, on which too depends the success of the conversions, since according to how a person is united with God in themselves, so they operate outside on the souls. So, I beg Your Paternity, for the love of God, to assist us. (JapSin 7, I, 264v)

According to this passage, the first consequence of a lack of workers was the prevention of the conversion of many fiefs that asked for missionaries, causing innumerable souls to be lost to hell, a fact that Cabral evidently considered a major issue, even if the number of converts was already high (“so great a harvest is made”).

The lack of manpower had been an ongoing problem for the Japanese mission since its inception and finding a solution had been slow-going. In theory, Xavier’s initial plan for the country necessitated only a handful of missionaries, who should have been handpicked by Loyola to attend what the missionaries called the “Japanese universities”. This group, in the intentions of Xavier, would have been enough to convert the main Buddhist institutions of Japan; this newly converted religious elite would then persuade the rest of country to follow suit. In the following year, a small but constant stream of missionaries moving back and forth kept the numbers of Jesuits in Japan rather low. The sudden growth of converted fiefs and requests for preachers in the 1570s had made the question more pressing for Cabral. Overall, in light of its aim to convert the whole country, the mission was obviously perpetually understaffed. Cabral’s solution for this problem was to train more Japanese missionaries in the pedagogical structure he proposed to build and then accept them into the Society of Jesus so that they would see their efforts recognised and be content. However, it was evident by the study plan he wished to implement that he did not envisage the possibility of letting the Japanese missionaries ever achieve autonomy and wanted them to work under European authority.

When the lack of manpower was somewhat eased in 1577, Cabral was relieved, but he deemed the helpers still insufficient and, in the same letter in which he announced their landing, he asked for missionaries from New Spain (JapSin 8, I, 136v). What he had not anticipated was how this increase in the number of the workers, as the 1580 letter of the Visitor complains, burdened the already weakened structure of the mission. There seemed to be too many new missionaries to be managed by Cabral’s centralised, authoritarian governing of the mission. Instead of being a solution, therefore, the new workers became an additional problem, which, according to Valignano, proved nearly fatal.

Another consequence of the low numbers of workers was their dispersion. They were too few to constitute significant communities in the fiefs where they preached and were generally forced to

live far apart from one another. This situation, aside from preventing the control of the mission by the superior, weakened the *esprit de corps* of the Jesuits and caused disedification and was “detrimental to [the Jesuits’] spiritual gain” (JapSin 7, I, 264v). The buildings that Cabral wished to build, intended for preparing a body of local missionaries and aiding the spiritual and physical rest of those already in the field, would help solve the problem of exhaustion and allow the Jesuits to fulfil more requests for preachers. If Valignano’s institutions appeared successful towards this latter endeavour (JapSin 8, I, 283r), they seemed less able to supply the places of encounter and communal life that Cabral desired. Indeed, in 1581, the latter lamented that the missionaries were still dispersed throughout the country (JapSin 9, I, 23r-24v).

Cabral’s idea of a retreat had quickly become central to his missionary plan for Japan, supported by his belief that “from [the Jesuits’ spiritual gain] too depends the success of the conversions, since according to how a person is united with God in themselves, so they operate outside on the souls”, as previously quoted. As he said in 1576:

[A college] would also work for our [spiritual] maintenance, in addition to [helping] the Japanese, and from time to time those of us who continuously travel through the kingdoms alone, without confession or other helps, and among many [dangerous] events, could come to this college to refresh ourselves. (JapSin 8, I, 12v)

The following year, he returned to the matter with the General, stating that “if there is no house where, every two, or three, years, we could [reside] to restore ourselves, it will be difficult to maintain virtue and spirit” (JapSin 8, I, 135v). Spiritual dryness was thus imperilling conversions and the other activities of the mission, and Cabral identified it as the root of all problems faced by the Japanese mission. Aside from the practical complications it could cause, such as inducing missionaries to give up and leave the already depleted mission (as Cabral himself would do years later), it also had supernatural consequences. From this point of view, Cabral’s missionary policy of giving priority to otherworldly concerns never changed throughout his stay in Japan.

At the same time, these worries suggest that physical exhaustion was a common state for the missionaries. References to the sicknesses that ailed them are often found in the sources, probably because they were considered as edifying sacrifices to the greater glory of God. Fatigue, on the other hand, was mentioned rarely, probably because it was not deemed heroic enough to find a place in reports. Luís Frois offers some exceptions to this trend; in 1565, having just landed in Japan and meeting his fellow missionaries for the first time, he perceived Cosme de Torres as “already very old, and tired, and [he] had

been in crutches just until few days ago”.²³ Brother Juan Fernández, as well, was “so worn out and wasted by his work that, when [he] saw him, [Froís] often imagined that he would end up with his soul ripped from him” (*EVORA* 1: 131r). Physical exhaustion was, quite plainly, not experienced only by the Japanese mission. Other examples abound in Jesuit mission history: between 1670 and 1690, the seriously understaffed Jesuit Chinese mission found itself exhausted and barely able to care spiritually for its flock, let alone convert new people (Brockey 2007, 138-9). Missionaries to the fishery coast around 1580 were in a similar situation, dying of exhaustion (Županov 2012, 435). The Jesuits in New France did not fare much better in the 1630s.²⁴

The situation of the Japanese mission, and particularly of Cabral, appears to have been aggravated by various factors that were not limited to physical weariness but that, due to their specific characteristics, come close to a burnout *ante litteram*. Probably due to the characterisation of burnout as a modern malady, the term is very rarely applied to the early modern period,²⁵ although similar afflictions that share the feeling of helplessness can be found through the centuries (Frijda, Parrott 2011, 411-12): acedia in late antiquity,²⁶ Renaissance melancholy (Gowland 2006), neurasthenia in the nineteenth century.²⁷ The early Japanese mission appears to share many aspects of burnout, such as fatigue, overextension, loneliness, lack of structure, the impossibility of living in a stable community (Kammer 1978, 3-8), as well as a feeling of alienation caused by the perception that fellow workers (in Cabral's case, Jesuits in India and Europe, but possibly even in Japan) were not supporting them adequately. The enormity of the task at hand could also have been a cause of burnout: the sixteenth-century Jesuit missionaries in Japan were attempting to convert a whole country with an understaffed, underfunded, and dispersed mission.

By linking the situation of the Japanese mission, and especially its superior, to the condition of burnout, the reasons for Cabral's fall into

23 Luís Froís to the brothers in Europe, 14 November 1563, in *EVORA* 1: 131r.

24 See, for instance, the descriptions of mission Superior Paul Le Jeune quoted in Parkman 1867, 19.

25 One of the few scholars who seems to have used the term to refer to the pre-modern period is Magone, who used it when discussing the consequences of the Jesuit early modern missions having limited resources in relation to their gargantuan objectives (the conversion of China in this case) (2012, 24).

26 “Acedia connoted a feeling of melancholy or spiritual dryness, which one recent author has compared to modern-day feelings of burn-out. This was often associated with monks and monastic houses. By the Carolingian period, the meaning of acedia shifted from spiritual dryness to the more modern usage of the word, sloth” (Williams 2012, 21).

27 Neurasthenia was “mental fatigue in its pathological form” (Arnetz, Ekman 2006, 9).

misery become clearer. Feelings of helplessness seem to have characterised many years of his stay in Japan; his inability to take any step to better the situation of the mission caused his proclaimed hopelessness in the face of the too arduous goals of the enterprise. It also says something about his interpretation of the situation. As analysed in the previous pages, Cabral's understanding of the work of grace was that it could be swayed by the effort and sacrifices of the missionaries. His later hopelessness suggests that he now believed that this link was no longer functional and that work in the Japanese mission was futile. This notion would have been aggravated by the impression he appeared to have harboured; the best converts among the Japanese often were so without his mediation, and his own actions had a minimal impact. The low morale of the whole mission is confirmed by Cabral's comments at the arrival of the Visitor in 1579: "I trust in God our Lord that not only will there be much fruit in the conversion of this gentility, but also that those of the Society who live here will be helped and consoled much by him in the spirit" (JapSin 8, I, 231r). Valignano's presence lifted an enormous weight from Cabral's shoulders. However, this does not mean that he had not previously considered some alternative solutions to save the mission, especially in case the Visitor, like his predecessor, did not make it to Japan.

5.4 Abandoning Japan

As soon as he had news of the new Visitor's arrival in Asia, Cabral's new objective became to leave Japan. In 1575, he had already pitched the idea of travelling to Rome to the General, although he admitted to being tied to Japan by his responsibilities:

And verily, I tell Your Paternity, that if I could leave this land in good conscience, and come to you, I would do it. I would beg you, with many tears, to have pity on so many souls who die in Japan, only for lack of who can save them from the jaws of the hellish wolf. (JapSin 7, I, 264v)

In this instance, Cabral was lamenting the insufficient workforce to answer the requests of evangelisation from the fiefs of central Japan. Here, he identified the cause behind this lack of missionaries as the inability of Rome to understand the importance of the Japanese mission, and therefore their unwillingness to provide both workers and funds to support it. He was not so desperate to accuse the General of having willingly abandoned the mission yet and thus framed the problem as one of ignorance while conveying the idea that he was available to travel to Rome if ordered to do so. Still, since the year before he had already been asking the Provincial to be allowed to

return to India in 1574, due to his lack of strength to continue evangelisation (JapSin 7, I, 320v). This paragraph appears a rework of the same request, presented instead as a sacrifice he was willing to undertake for the mission.

When, in 1576, Cabral received the information that Valignano was in India and planned to visit Japan, he interpreted this as meaning that lettered governance was about to be reinstated in Asia. This left only the link between Japan and Europe to be restored, and Cabral suggested he could be the one to do it. Although not explicitly stated, Cabral believed that Valignano's presence could free him from the obligation of staying in Japan by substituting him as superior, just as Álvares would have. Moreover, if Valignano never made it to the country, as Cabral feared after he had seen the previous Visitor shipwrecked just off the coast (JapSin 8, I, 13r), Cabral might have already received permission to go to Europe and therefore been able to hand over his post to any missionary and leave. Appealing directly to the General, Cabral seemed prepared to work around Valignano's orders to hold on to his post as superior of Japan and to keep his hope.²⁸ Starting from that year, then, Cabral rationalised various times his wish to be allowed to travel to Rome, framing his leaving of the mission as the best help he could offer it. In 1576, he tried to be as persuasive as possible, using emotional language to move the General, and again spoke of the travel to Rome as a sacrifice on his part:

If I could, or I received permission from Your Paternity, for the pain I feel to see [the mission] suffering these necessities, I would throw myself at Your Paternity's feet and cry so many tears, to move you to help this land [...] This would also help Your Paternity to obtain real information about it, because I have visited twice not only the kingdoms where Christian communities are present, but also many where the law of God has not been announced. And I could also inform you about the Province of India, because I have dealt with the matters of almost all the colleges of India, and I have lived in all of them for some years. If Your Paternity believes it is in the service of God and for the good of the Society in these parts, I can go there and give you this information, because I consider the suffering of so many necessities to be much worse than all the trouble and the dangers of such a voyage. (JapSin 8, I, 12v)

He proposed a similar idea the following year, taking instead a more practical approach. He presented in detail the actions he could take in Europe to support the Japanese mission:

28 There is no extant copy of the letter that Valignano sent to Cabral, which was received in 1576, but from Cabral's reply to it, it is evident that the Visitor ordered him to endure (Cabral to Valignano, 1576, in JapSin 8, II, 13Ar).

Japan is so large and so important that, looking at how little attention is given to it in India I have understood that not only in Europe, but even in India, only half of it[s importance] is understood. [There is] much that could be done in Japan for the service of God, and it is not. So, it being for the greater service of God, I wished very much to go to inform Your Paternity about these parts, and at the same time, negotiate with the King so that he would give [alms, in the form of] a rent for a college for Japan, where many locals could become workers [...]. If I went to give this information on this land to Your Paternity, I could also give that of all parts of India and the workers there [...]. In four years I could go and be back, if Your Paternity thinks it is good. (JapSin 8, I, 136v)

In a manner, Cabral anticipated some of the roles that the mission procurators would have in later years within these lines; while this position had been created for the Indian Province in 1565, Japan at the time did not have a procurator. It would not be proposed until the Bungo consultation of 1580, where most consultors (including Cabral) agreed that Japan needed a direct way to report to Rome that did not depend on Goa nor on correspondence (Schütte 1980, 2: 34).²⁹ Still, his previous letters show that reporting on the Japanese mission was a secondary objective for Cabral.

Still, even if not his primary motivation, Cabral seemed confident that travelling to Europe was a direct solution to the problems mentioned through the years in his letters, which were never properly addressed by the Curia. He planned to speak personally with religious and temporal authorities alike to explain to them the importance of the mission to Japan and beg them to intervene to help it. In his eyes, this meant receiving both economic support for the creation of a college and a residence, and assistance in the form of manpower. As much as his problems remained the same, though, what had changed was Cabral's disillusionment with lettered obedience. He had left behind the possibility of overcoming distance through correspondence, and to provide "real information" about Japan by this means, now considering letters an insufficient tool.

On the other hand, Cabral was careful not to mention explicitly what appears to be one of his major concerns once his correspondence is considered in its totality. Leaving Japan was his best chance to save his own soul. The spiritual state of the mission was so disedifying that, by now, he likely already considered it a danger to his soul and was attempting to take precautions in this sense. As often happened in his correspondence, he would not mention the problem explicitly until it became too

²⁹ For a later example, see missionary Nicolas Trigault's work for the Chinese mission (Clossey 2008, 41).

much for him to bear, but he had already expressed his wish to leave the country strongly enough that this reason can also be suspected.

Indeed, if the missionaries were edified in 1576 by the news of the arrival of the Visitor, Cabral's optimism was short-lived. Valignano took another three years to reach Japan, and there were fears that he had met his death at sea.³⁰ As shown by the Visitor's first letter from the country, in the meantime the state of the mission seriously worsened, as its economic complications were still unsolved: in 1578, Cabral wrote an extensive, urgent letter to Europe to ask that no more missionaries be sent "because they cannot be maintained".³¹ In the same letter, he explicitly accused the Goan Jesuits of abandoning Japan:

We are at the edge of the world among gentiles and ministers of the Devil who would gladly eat our livers, and we do not have rents nor Viceroy at our doors... I cannot help but being very disconsolate, not so much for the great work I have to do... [but because] we are forgotten by everybody and, as they have everything in abundance, they forget their brothers, so miserable without anything... as soon as Father Antonio de Quadros died, in Japan we started feeling the absence of his charity, because everything that belonged to Japan and was in India, became property without an owner. (JapSin 8, I, 203v)

Instead of the improvements Cabral had been hoping for, the structural problems of the mission came to the fore due to the new arrivals. Although he admitted it only in 1580, the mission's overly simplistic manner of government was becoming too strained and, as both Valignano and Organtino pointed out (Schütte 1980, 1: 361), this meant more stress on Cabral, since the power was centralised in his hands. The fact that some new Jesuits were enough to destabilise the mission in this manner suggests that the financial situation was indeed strained and Cabral's hesitation to divert the mission's funds to the creation of a new institution, the college, was somewhat founded. At the same time, his inability to foresee the near collapse of the mission once the desired help was obtained does not speak highly of his competence as superior. Still, unfortunately for him, he was one of the few senior Portuguese missionaries left in Asia, and the Visitor did not grant him permission to leave the country.

Precipitated by the aggravating situation, Cabral's pleas took a more drastic form in this letter of 1578 to the General, when he asked straightforwardly to be relieved from his position of superior:

30 In 1578, Father Antonio Prenestino (c. 1543-89) wrote that the missionaries in Japan were worried for the fate of the Visitor (JapSin 8, I, 209r).

31 Cabral to General Mercurian, Usuki, 15 October 1578 (JapSin 8, I, 203r).

I have decided to write this, in this [explicit] manner, to Your Paternity, to unburden myself, and to inform you of the reality of what is happening here, since you are the universal Father of the Society, and you carry on your shoulders the problems of Japan [too]. This that I have pointed out to you, I also write to the Father Visitor Alessandro Valignano, asking him very much, for the love of God Our Lord and his five wounds, to send somebody from there, or to appoint somebody [else] among those here, as superior of these parts. Because in truth I do not dare anymore, nor can I, with so many troubles and turmoil, like the ones I have endured until now. And it is reasonable [...] after so many years that I am so distracted [...] If I never was more forward [in asking this] it was because I was waiting every year for Our Lord to bring the Father Visitor here, who could personally give me this charity, after seeing my insufficiency and need. Since his arrival is so delayed, it became necessary for me to write this. (JapSin 8, I, 203v-4r)

This document contains no references to his previous intention of informing the General by going to Rome in person. Physical and psychological fatigue was, instead, the cause explicitly stated to support his drastic request. The daily managing of the mission, an already taxing task, was doubtlessly aggravated by Cabral's controlling tendencies, which led him to carry out continuous visitations to the numerous churches and outposts of the mission. His initial worry with the possibility of sin among the missionaries seems to have deteriorated in intense fear when he started seeing divine punishments in the disasters that befell the mission. The few remedies taken by Cabral to alleviate the problems of the mission caused his physical exhaustion. By pointing out that he had been "distracted" for many years, he was referring to earthly preoccupations that damaged his soul, provoking his spiritual fatigue. Far from being a new preoccupation, the previous letters mentioned above hint that this had been an ongoing problem for some time. Cabral had been hoping to leave Japan possibly since 1574 and had been explicitly showing concern for his soul since at least 1577. That he stated explicitly his request to leave only in 1578 simply shows that, by that point, Cabral was too desperate to be edifying or restrained in his writing ("if I never was more forward [in asking this] it was because I was waiting [...] it became necessary for me to write this").

In 1579, after the arrival of the Visitor, Cabral wrote confidently that "[Valignano's] virtue, prudence, and charity, and the other gifts that Our Lord granted him, assure me that all his orders regarding these parts will be the best and most conformed to the divine honour and glory" (JapSin 8, I, 231r). Cabral seemed to hope that the Visitor would not only replenish the finances of the mission, but also reinstate proper holy obedience, and the connection with God that had

been lost: Cabral writes that the missionaries would receive spiritual help and consolation, too, from Valignano. Even as he was writing this, either considering himself too disconsolate and weary to be helped or not actually holding much hope for the mission to be saved, Cabral was still planning to put as much distance as possible between himself and Japan.

The beginning of the decade of the 1580s seemed to have reduced Cabral's faith in Valignano's abilities and worsened his own crisis of hope. An examination of a letter written in 1580 helps to clarify his intentions and his state of mind.³² Because the Visitor had named him superior of the house of Bungo instead of letting him leave, Cabral appealed to the General for help, listing seven reasons that explained why he needed to leave all manner of command to other Jesuits. Among them, again, were physical and spiritual exhaustion: his heart had been "reduced" by the many difficulties, he wrote, meaning that he had lost his courage, and he was thus unfit to lead the Japanese mission any further. The most important points for the present discussion, however, are reasons number three and seven.

The third is because, as Your Paternity knows well, for as much of an angel a man is, if he is Superior for a long time, due to the distractions of the business on the one hand, and with the liberty that came with the position on the other, not only does he not develop, but instead mostly diminishes his spirit and humility. And if this happens to those with much spirit, what will it do to those who never had any, and have lived for many years with liberty and distractions? Because I have been in the Society for nearly 29 years, and of these I was subordinate for only three, and for most of the rest I always took care of others. In these 25 or 26 years that I have been Superior, I never had an interruption, only once, for a month, and another time for three. Now, Your Paternity can understand what my state is after 16 years [of being] a Superior. (JapSin 8, I, 284r)

Aside from being an attempt at justification in the face of Valignano's criticism,³³ this passage expresses a yearning for a more orderly structure of command, where a direct connection with his own superiors would have helped him to exercise obedience to some extent. Overall, it is the salvific effects of holy obedience that Cabral declares to yearn for, hoping to gain the humility and spiritual proximity to God that this practice should foster in Jesuit understanding:

³² Francisco Cabral to the General, Kuchinotsu, 30 August 1580; originally in JapSin 8, I, 283r-5r; transcribed in Schütte 1958, 497-502.

³³ See above, Valignano's 1581 letter.

The seventh [reason] is because since God Our Lord in his mercy showed me many favours, in the preservation and increase [in numbers] both of the converts and of those of the Society, I wish now to leave this obligation. Because until now we made more in poverty and need, because it was a necessity, both for the inner and exterior self (?), and for the growth of conversion. However, since three or four years ago we proceed with more liberality and expenses, and with people who are not very used to the works and necessities of the land, nor to its many temptations and freedoms. So that “I foresaw the coming storm, as it were from a watchtower”.³⁴ So I desire very much to get out of these labours. And I would enjoy not to write this to Your Paternity, if I could find some solution here with the Superiors. However, it is many years that I requested this to the Provincials, and to the past Visitor, and now I have requested to the Father Visitor, Alessandro Valignano, without obtaining it from any of them. So that, considering on the one hand my shortfalls, and on the other how little help I had from the visitors and the provincials, I am forced to ask Your Paternity for aid, and to ask you to have mercy on me. Since it is 26 years that I have continuously taken care of other people, now allow me to do it only for myself and to get ready to die, to recollect myself from how much preoccupied I am, even if I fear that when I will receive Your Paternity’s reply on this, it will be so late, considering how much one wears oneself out here, that my life will already be ended, together with these labours. (JapSin 8, I, 284v)

Cabral in this passage repurposed the narrative of abandonment of spiritually fruitful poverty that he often used to condemn the decade of the 1560s to describe the events of the mission after 1577 or 1578.³⁵ In this letter, the extreme poverty he decried precisely in 1578 was transformed into a virtuous state instead of the cause of the mission’s impending demise. Cabral would keep this interpretation for the years to come, when he clashed again and again with Valignano: excessive spending would always be the main grievance he levelled against him.³⁶

In the end, after ascertaining that Cabral had no intention to maintain his position in the Japanese mission, Valignano allowed him to return to Macao. Mercurian had wanted him to become vice-provincial of Japan, but Valignano overruled this appointment, officially

34 Cic. *Fam.* 4.3.1. (*Perseus Project*, <https://perseus.uchicago.edu>).

35 It is not clear to what event Cabral is referring to, that happened “two or three years” before 1580, although it could be the arrival of Valignano in East Asia.

36 See for example, Cabral to General Acquaviva, Kochi, 15 December 1593, in *DI*, 16: 510-51.

because Gaspar Coelho had just been nominated, and Cabral had demonstrated an inability to govern the Japanese mission. Although Cabral obtained his wish to leave Japan behind, he was still appointed superior of the Chinese mission, a role he would keep until he left for India in 1585.

5.5 A Lost Mission and the End of Hope

Cabral's 1580 letter finally made explicit his wish to sever all ties with the Japanese mission, which, according to him, had compromised itself too much and was therefore condemned to fail. This was not a sudden decision, nor it was prompted solely by his dislike of Valignano's policies. Cabral's opinion that the success of the mission depended entirely on its ability to follow the Jesuit way of proceeding (or at least his interpretation of it) and therefore God's will returned in full force in this letter. For Cabral, this meant that the mission contaminated every one of its workers with sin and imperilled their souls. This interpretation imperilled the main aims of the mission, as understood in the early modern period, and therefore the concept itself. As Cabral saw it, the Japanese mission, instead of being a way of saving the souls of the Japanese people and of the missionaries, had become a source of corruption for the latter. The Japanese, on their part, were either not reached by the Jesuits' proselytising efforts, were not the excellent converts they were supposed to be or saved themselves without the guidance of the missionaries.

The perception that the Japanese mission had forsaken the spirit of the Society, which Cabral had when he landed in 1570, never really went away. According to his view, this distance from God had a complex fallout, and the spiritual dryness and loose cohesion of the Society were both causes and symptoms of it. Cabral's correspondence suggests that he believed something was irredeemably wrong with the mission, as shown by the general exhaustion and lack of edification among the missionaries, the perception of which was probably worsened by Cabral's own state of burnout. It appeared that everything had been going downhill, regardless of the triumphant numbers of conversions: if the Jesuits had renounced their vows, and therefore God, God in turn had abandoned the mission.

Unsurprisingly, Cabral identified the first sign of divine punishment as the accident that claimed the life of the Visitor in 1573. "Father Gonçalo Álvares [...] was coming to visit these parts but Our Lord was served when he did not reach them and everything remained in disorder until now", he wrote in 1576 (JapSin 8, I, 13r). This event broke the direct connection of obedience that existed between the Japanese mission and the rest of Asia and is explicitly identified as the reason why various catastrophes were befalling the mission. In

another missive of the same year, Cabral made explicit his belief that God had seen fit to punish them: "When I learned that Our Lord had punished us taking away all the heads of this Province, and leaving it with so many necessities, I lost hope" (JapSin 8, II, 13Ar). Creating a link between the sinking of Álvares' carrack and the death of Antonio de Quadros the year before, he believed to be reading and interpreting the signs of God. Cabral did not mention, in this instance, the exact reason behind this castigation, but his previous correspondence points to the actions of the missionaries. The continuous scorn he perceived for the vows of poverty and obedience marked the mission as sinful. He might have considered himself culpable as well, having nearly given up between 1573 and 1576. After all, he believed that "those who have [lost hope] not only do nothing, but are a hindrance to the other's good proceeding" (JapSin 8, I, 205r). The loss of hope, one of the theological virtues together with faith and charity, had consequence on more than just morale. It was a reprehensible attitude itself, connected to the loss of faith in God and in God's intervention on behalf of the Jesuits, which was a grave sin in Cabral's eyes. He regretted having despaired, as he wrote in 1576 referring to the new arrivals: "Our Lord in our time of greater need showed us His mercy, because if He punished us as a judge, He consoled us as merciful Father" (JapSin 8, II, 13Ar). However, it does not seem that he was able to acquire again hope for Japan. The years 1576 and 1577 represent a slight improvement over the bleakness that had engulfed Cabral since 1573, and he felt he had finally received a sign from God, after years of doubting if his work was truly following the divine plan or if he was committing some irreparable error that would condemn his soul. At the same time, however, he still desired to be freed from Japan. His uneasiness about the lack of contact with Rome, accentuated by the long wait for Valignano, let him fall again into despair by 1578.

This meant that there was another ramification of the mission's lack of proximity to God: it endangered the salvation of the souls of the missionaries. According to Cabral's descriptions, missionary activity put them in danger of losing themselves, with too little structure to help them recover. This situation made it "difficult to maintain virtue and spirit", as he wrote, probably referring to both himself and his brethren. Cabral thus ended his period in Japan suffering from a crisis of faith. With the worsening of the condition of the mission, his boldness in facing the problems of the field had faded; he did not "travel more confident in God and in the obedience for which [he] was doing that travel" (JapSin 7, III, 99r) anymore, as he had in the past. He instead grew weary of the perils of moving frequently, as he did while following his policy of continuous visitations. In 1581, Cabral requested to the General a personal plenary indulgence at the moment of death, since he travelled among dangers, without a

companion who could hear his confession if needed (JapSin 9, I, 24r). Even the glory of martyrdom, which held its appeal earlier on and could have been an expedited road to salvation, was not assured anymore when God's favour was removed from missionary work. Such a negative attitude towards the work of evangelisation was reflected in some documents written by Valignano in this period as well, suggesting that it was widespread in the community. In 1579, for instance, he wrote to the General:

[the Jesuit missionaries of Japan] are exposed to many spiritual dangers; the enemy does not sleep, and temptations press them hard. They left the world and entered religion [i.e., the Society of Jesus] in order to ensure their salvation; and are they now to be exposed to all these perils in the name of religious obedience, and be laden with burdens which are really beyond their strength to bear? That surely would be expecting too much.³⁷

Overall, the situation of the mission of Japan did not favour a climate of edification and hope for the future. The missionary work, instead of lifting them to the imitation of the apostles, seemed to drag them to the depletion of their physical and spiritual energies; not only was it not helping them save their own souls, but it was also imperilling them by exposing them to temptations and sin. Contextualised in this dangerous situation, Cabral's wish to leave became a desperate last attempt to save his soul. The unsatisfactory quality of the Japanese converts made the objective of the mission, saving other people's souls, unattainable, and thus not a good way of reaching salvation for the missionaries. At least two of the solemn vows had been broken, and the Jesuit community was dispersed, making it impossible to restore the proper way of proceeding in the mission itself. Cabral therefore decided to reach outside it with the same objective.

The reinstating of obedience appears therefore as Cabral's last resort. Even if God had abandoned the Japanese mission, surely the same had not happened to the rest of the Society. Returning to Europe would have allowed him to rekindle the contact with God through his superiors and at the same time distance himself from the sinful context of the Japanese mission. Cabral's attempts to leave the country show again how central obedience was in his understanding of salvation and how, once he believed the Japanese mission was hindering it, he wished to reinstate its connections to save himself.

³⁷ Translated in Schütte 1980, 1: 300.

5.6 Conclusions

As shown in Luke Clossey's study, the salvation of the missionary's soul and those of the people to whom he preached were the two main objectives of mission, the latter being often understood as a manner of bringing about the former. This system was not successful in the Japanese mission in the decade of the 1570s. The years between 1573 and 1579, with their highs and lows, provide in the end a good example of how these ideal objectives of the mission could not materialised.

Numerous issues, as seen, had fostered Cabral's belief that the way of proceeding had been abandoned by the Jesuits in Japan. The manner of government he maintained in the mission caused low morale among his brethren. It was, however, his inability to overcome the isolation of the missionaries, who were dispersed within Japan and distant from the other missionary centre of Asia, let alone of Europe, that contributed to the mission's generalised perception that the Society was destined to doom in the country. The salvation of the Jesuits as an order was found in the Institute, and if this was not upheld, the possibility of being contaminated by the (gentile, in this case) world and losing oneself was very high.

Obedience, in this sense, had ceased to be a way to salvation for Cabral because of the remoteness of his missionary field and the consequent difficulty in keeping in touch with his superiors. Due to this isolation, Cabral's letters also expressed a sense of abandonment by the rest of the Society and a lack of worth in his mission. This was another element that heightened his impression of his growing distance from and abandonment by God. The fear that he might die in such conditions and not be saved was such that he asked for a personal confirmation of plenary indulgence at the moment of death and appealed to both the Visitor and the General to be allowed to leave, a wish that was granted in the end.