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Abstract

When Alessandro Valignano arrived in Japan in 1579, the Society of Jesus had been working in the country for thirty years. However, despite impressive numbers and considerable influence with the feudal lords, the mission was struggling. The few Jesuit workers were exhausted and growing increasingly frustrated by the leadership of Francisco Cabral, who refused to cater to Japanese sensibilities or respect the Japanese people. When Valignano arrived, he saw the harm Cabral was doing and forcibly changed the direction of the mission, pursuing policies of Jesuit accommodation to Japanese culture and respect for the Japanese converts who were training to become priests. These policies were based in respect for Japan's culture and love for its people. Under three years of Valignano's leadership the fortunes of the Jesuit mission changed and the Society's work in Japan began to flourish once again. Indeed, Valignano set the course for the next thirty years of the Japanese mission.

Keywords

Valignano, Society of Jesus, Jesuit, Japan, Accommodation

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INTRODUCTION

Cultural adaptation and accommodation have presented a dilemma to every missionary from every age: should the native culture be embraced, or confronted? Should Christians adapt, or intentionally separate themselves? The arrival of Alessandro Valignano in Japan occurred at a time when these questions were at the heart of the Jesuit mission there. The Jesuits had recently moved away from a policy of accommodation at the insistence of Superior Francisco Cabral, but their work suffered as a result. It fell to Valignano to correct the course of the mission, and his efforts are worth close examination. His emphasis on accommodation to Japanese culture provides a case study on the importance of cultural adaptation for Christian mission and the necessity of cultural respect for all believers. The decades following his arrival demonstrated the wisdom of his leadership; the mission flourished as never before. The problem of cultural adaptation will always accompany the work of missions, and Christians will always wrestle when confronted with foreign cultures. Yet the work done by Alessandro Valignano and the Jesuit mission in Japan speaks volumes; respect and cultural accommodation can act as powerful catalysts for missionary success. All believers, regardless of whether they aspire to missionary work, can benefit from an understanding of the work done by Alessandro Valignano and the Jesuit mission in Japan.

THE LEADERSHIP OF CABRAL AND THE ARRIVAL OF VALIGNANO

The Society of Jesus' mission to Japan began on 15 August 1549, when Francis Xavier and two Jesuit companions landed at the port of Kagoshima. For the next thirty years, the Jesuits gradually established a foothold on the islands. This was not easy, as Japan's culture was more foreign than any the Society had yet encountered. Nonetheless, the missionaries persisted, and after thirty years, there were well over 100,000 Christians in Japan. Yet in the late 1570's, the mission began to falter. There were several factors at work here, but preeminent among them were the lack of Jesuit workers and leadership from Francisco Cabral as Superior of the mission.

When Francisco Cabral arrived in the spring of 1570, he enacted several sweeping reforms aimed at refining the character of the workers and refocusing the aims of the mission. Yet these reforms were rooted in his distrust of the Japanese and his contempt for their culture. For example, since the time of Xavier, Jesuits had worn the orange silk robes of the Buddhist priests, for the Japanese reviled anyone with a poor appearance, and as long as they wore their tattered black cassocks, the Jesuits found it difficult to be taken seriously. Thus, Xavier decided that he and his fellow workers would wear the same silk robes. He was determined to dress at least as well as the Buddhist priests in order to send the message that the Jesuits were deserving of equal respect. The change of costume had dramatic effects on their work and became a symbol of the Society's methods in Japan. After Cabral arrived, however, he forbade anyone—even native Japanese training to be

priests—from wearing the silk robes. He also refused to adhere to Japanese dietary expectations, going so far as to tell local lords to their face that he would not refrain from eating meat. In short, Cabral rejected any forms of cultural accommodation whatsoever and ignored those Jesuits who urged him to do otherwise. As a result, many Japanese found him rude and offensive, and he did great damage to the Society’s work.

Francisco Cabral labored in Japan for nine years before the arrival of Alessandro Valignano, the Society of Jesus’ Visitor to the Eastern Missions. Valignano has been called the “principal architect of the Jesuit mission in Japan.”¹ This may seem an unusual title for a man who arrived in Japan almost exactly thirty years after the mission had begun, yet Fujita’s assessment is entirely accurate. Apart from Francis Xavier, no other man did so much to shape the Society’s work in that country: “indeed, it would not be too much to say that their entire approach to the Japanese people was transformed by [Valignano].”² His success was not confined to Japan; Matthew Ricci himself would call Valignano the founder “of the Catholic Church in China.”³ Alessandro Valignano was born in 1639 into the Italian nobility and entered the Society of Jesus in 1566.⁴ Several years later he went to serve in the East Indies. Like Francis Xavier, Valignano was disappointed with the efforts being made there and, just like Xavier, he was intrigued by what he had heard of Japan.⁵

Thus, in his role as Visitor, Valignano set sail for Japan. On 25 July 1579, he landed in the port of Kuchinotsu, located in the Arima district on the island of Kyushu. Valignano chose that port deliberately; he knew that the young *daimyo*⁶ Haronobu had been oppressing Christians since he had succeeded his father two years earlier. He also knew that the *daimyo* had failed to rid his domain of Christianity, was feeling remorseful for his actions, and was fearful that he had lost the Portuguese trade for good. Sensing an opportunity, Valignano instructed the Portuguese captain to land in Kuchinotsu. Haronobu apologized profusely to Valignano, even offering to be baptized. The Visitor wisely told the *daimyo* to wait; apart from doubting his sincerity, Valignano wanted Haronobu to guarantee that the Christians in his province would be unmolested. Though the *daimyo* readily agreed to Valignano’s terms, it would still be several months until Valignano

¹ Neil S. Fujita, *Japan’s Encounter with Christianity: the Catholic Mission in Pre-Modern Japan* [New York: Paulist Press, 1991], 76.

² J.S.A. Elisonas, “Journey to the West,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 34, no. 1 [2007]: 30.

³ China Group, “Valignano, Alessandro,” in *Dictionary of Asian Christianity*, ed. Scott W. Sunquist [Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001], 869.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Fujita, *Japan’s Encounter with Christianity*, 77.

⁶ *Daimyo* were essentially feudal lords who controlled ancestral fiefs and had authority over villages and peasants. They employed retainers from the warrior class, known as *samurai*, to manage towns and districts and also provide troops in times of war.

baptized him. When Haronobu converted, four thousand of his *samurai* and seven thousand more of his people were baptized.⁷

From the moment he landed, Valignano demonstrated that he was well-suited to work in Japan. He realized the importance of foreign trade to the Japanese and how to use it to his advantage. He also understood that certain *daimyo* might be willing to make a show of converting just to please him, thus Valignano wisely placed conditions on any agreements with them. He had been receiving reports from the Jesuits in Japan for several years—they had fired his imagination and inspired him to come to the country—and had read them with great care. These letters had given Valignano high expectations; he believed that he would find a thriving church under a unified Jesuit leadership. But there were many problems resulting from the mass conversions that had taken place over that last few decades, not the least of which was the scarcity of workers.⁸ Although Valignano had sent more Jesuits in 1577 and 1578, Japan had seen an astonishing 70,000 people convert in just nine years, and there were still less than fifty Jesuits scattered throughout the entire country. Aside from being overworked, the morale of the Jesuits was extremely low because of Cabral's policies, for they understood that the end of cultural accommodation would lead to the decline of the mission.⁹ Thus, Valignano arrived to find an exhausted and demoralized group of Jesuits and a growing population of new Christians who did not have access to teaching or to the sacraments.

Valignano was taken aback as the reality of the situation hit him. Ross suggests that

Much of the shock can be explained by the contrast between the reality he found on Kyushu and what he had been reading in the letters from Japan while still in Europe and later in India. Indeed, while he was at Macao, on his way to Japan, he was full of the certainty that a glorious Christian Church was rapidly coming into being there, lacking only Japanese clergy and a bishop of its own.¹⁰

Valignano himself would write several months later of his surprise, noting that the difference between the reports coming out of Japan and the reality of affairs in the country were “as pronounced as the difference between black and

⁷ Johannes Laures, S.J., *The Catholic Church in Japan: A Short History* [Westport: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1970], 99-100.

⁸ One of the prominent features of the Jesuit mission to Japan was mass conversion. Typically, when a *daimyo* converted to Christianity, he would make a proclamation giving the Jesuits permission to preach in his province and his subjects permission to convert. Often, many of the *daimyo's* subjects would convert out of loyalty to their lord and occasionally, the lord would actually declare that all subjects were required to convert. Thus, by converting a *daimyo*, the Jesuits could often count on tens of thousands of subsequent conversions.

⁹ Diego Pacheco, S.J., “The Europeans in Japan,” in *Southern Barbarians*, ed. Michael Cooper [Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1971], 53.

¹⁰ Andrew C. Ross, *A Vision Betrayed: The Jesuits in Japan and China, 1542-1742* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994], 55.

white.”¹¹ Realizing that the Society in Europe had only been told of the Japanese mission’s successes and none of its setbacks or hardships, Valignano put in place strict guidelines concerning any reports that left the country.¹² Before Valignano arrived, the letters sent from Japan had been written with the hope of obtaining support, which meant that the Jesuits distorted the true situation in Japan in their attempt to lure others of their order to the mission.¹³ Though this discovery at first angered Valignano, he would later come to the conclusion that those who had never been to Japan would have had a difficult time understanding fully what they read in the letters the Jesuits had sent. After having been in Japan for a year, he wrote, “this is the reason why it is impossible either in India or in Europe, to evaluate or to decide the problems of Japan; nor can one even understand or imagine how things occur there, because it is another world, another way of life, other customs, and other laws.”¹⁴ Although Valignano’s disillusionment had severely startled him, he resolved to work in Japan, correcting what he saw as the most serious problems: some of the *daimyo* were oppressing their Christians, people were apostatizing, the continued wars and conflict meant that many Christian communities were isolated, small and weak, and the Jesuits were too few to deal with any of these problems effectively.¹⁵

Valignano believed that the greatest threat to the mission came from Cabral’s leadership. When the Visitor arrived in 1579, the Christian population in Japan was near 130,000. Though Valignano did not ignore the fact that the church had grown immensely under Cabral, he feared for its continued existence. The majority of the Japanese church was not being ministered to because Cabral had ignored the *dojuku*¹⁶ and had elevated none of them to the priesthood. This boded ill for the future if the church continued to grow at such a fast pace.¹⁷ Moreover, few of the new Jesuit arrivals understood Japanese; Cabral had not arranged for them to learn the language, even though Valignano had earlier insisted that they should.¹⁸ Valignano was also extremely upset with Cabral’s attitude towards the Japanese in general. The Visitor thought that the only reason any of the *daimyo* tolerated Cabral’s insulting behavior was because he was able to convince the Portuguese to come to their harbors.¹⁹ He was especially frustrated by the Superior’s refusal to allow the Jesuits to accommodate to Japanese culture. Valignano would later write:

¹¹ Fujita, *Japan’s Encounter with Christianity*, 78.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ross, *Vision Betrayed*, 56.

¹⁴ C.R. Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan, 1549-1650* [Manchester, UK: Carcanet Press Limited, 1993], 75-76.

¹⁵ Laures, *Catholic Church in Japan*, 101-102.

¹⁶ *Dojuku* was the term that the Buddhists used for their novices; the Christians used it to refer to “a lay acolyte who dedicated himself to evangelization by teaching the catechism and preaching.” See Fujita, *Japan’s Encounter with Christianity*, 74.

¹⁷ Ross, *Vision Betrayed*, 55.

¹⁸ Ibid., 57.

¹⁹ George Ellison, *Deus Destroyed: The Image of Christianity in Early Modern Japan* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973], 56.

As a result of our not adapting ourselves to their customs, two serious evils followed, as indeed I realised [*sic*] from experience. They were the chief source of many others: First, we forfeited the respect and esteem of the Japanese, and second, we remained strangers, so to speak, to the Christians.²⁰

VALIGNANO AND THE POLICY OF ACCOMODATION

Alessandro Valignano came to believe strongly that the Jesuits should make every effort to adapt and live in a way that would respect the Japanese: “everywhere in every possible way everything was to be done in the Japanese fashion and with Japanese ceremony; and this was a matter of principle.”²¹ Many of the Jesuits, especially those who had favored such an approach before Cabral had arrived, cheered Valignano’s support of an accommodative policy. They believed that Cabral’s policies were shortsighted and offensive to the Japanese. Some of them, including Father Organtino Gnechi-Soldi, went so far as to openly resist Cabral’s orders. Organtino had continued to wear silk robes, in defiance of Cabral, and labored to learn Japanese. It is said of him, “his whole life was attuned totally to the Japanese way.” Organtino himself, after having spent twenty years in Japan, wrote, “I am more Japanese than an Italian, for the Lord of his grace has transformed me into one of that nation.” Organtino encouraged other Jesuits to follow his example, though none would match him in fulfilling his exhortation to “attempt to adapt ourselves in everything as much as possible.”²²

Valignano was in complete agreement with this sentiment and wrote extensively about how the Jesuits were to behave while in Japan. It was more than a simple matter of the material from which their robes were made; Valignano recognized immediately that Japanese culture was dependent upon a complex code of etiquette, honor and respect. He knew that if the Jesuits did not respect these things, or if they were seen as trying to replace it with European customs, the Society’s efforts in Japan would fail. Valignano thus composed an extremely detailed written code of conduct for the Jesuits in Japan. There were seven divisions in this manual:

- 1: How authority is won and is preserved in dealings with the Japanese.
- 2: How the confidence of the Christians is to be gained.
- 3: Of the forms of politeness which the Fathers and the irmaos have to observe with externs (non-Jesuits).
- 4: The manner to be adopted in presenting and receiving sakazuki and sakasama (rice wine and dessert).

²⁰ Ross, *Vision Betrayed*, 63.

²¹ Elison, *Deus Destroyed*, 56.

²² Fujita, *Japan’s Encounter with Christianity*, 92-93.

- 5: The manner to be adopted by the Fathers and the irmaos in dealing with each other and with other members of the household.
- 6: The manner of receiving ambassadors and other persons of distinction. Invitations to be sent and presents to be made.
- 7: How our houses and churches in Japan are to be built.²³

Valignano was meticulous in his instructions. He had paid close attention during his short time in Japan and had endeavored to learn all he could from the Jesuits and Japanese converts what was appropriate behavior. Below is a small portion of his remarks on proper attitudes towards the Japanese diet:

I request and require all my dearest Padres . . . who are now and who hereafter will be in Japan, that they do as much as they should to win control over themselves, accommodating themselves in everything to the foods used in Japan and the manner of eating; since it is very important—for many reasons which I know by experience—to the service of Our Lord and to the success of our endeavor in Japan that we win control over ourselves in this matter, becoming accustomed to their food. They should not weaken and be easily overcome by initial repugnance at these [foods] or by the notion that they might be excused, that their stomachs cannot bear such foods; rather, they should with virtue and charity vanquish this repugnance. For experience has shown to me personally and to many others that, determined to control ourselves, we can achieve in this matter more than we had considered, and that our nature in a few short days accommodates itself to that which man wants, when he is determined to do it.²⁴

Cabral had declared that he would certainly continue to eat meat and fish, no matter what the bonzes²⁵ or others said; Valignano informed the Jesuits that they would eat what the Japanese ate, no matter how foreign the food seemed. Valignano's stress on proper conduct extended to matters of ceremony (choosing an appropriate gift based on the rank of the person they were visiting), manners (loud laughter was inappropriate, as was staring) and even proper architecture. Valignano expected each Jesuit residence to have a separate tea house, in which the *cha-no-yu* could be performed.²⁶ The Jesuits were also to conduct themselves correctly in matters of language; Valignano wrote that "to speak or write Japanese other than in the accustomed manner is impolite and invites ridicule, just as if we

²³ Ross, *Vision Betrayed*, 63.

²⁴ Elison, *Deus Destroyed*, 60.

²⁵ The word "bonze" was Xavier's pronunciation of the Japanese word, *bozu*, which denoted a monk or a priest. See Richard H. Drummond, *A History of Christianity in Japan* [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971], 39, n. 29.

²⁶ The *cha-no-yu* was an intricate tea ceremony, which was extremely popular among the Japan nobility at this time.

were to speak Latin backwards and with many mistakes.”²⁷ In addition to all of this, Valignano suggested that all Jesuits take a bath once a week. Though the Japanese bathed daily, the Visitor’s “medieval background” prevented him from taking too drastic a step with regards to bathing.²⁸ One matter in which Valignano surprisingly agreed with Cabral was in the matter of dress: the Jesuits would for the time being continue to wear the black cotton habits that Cabral had ordered them to use, instead of silk robes.²⁹ Only the *dojuku*, being Japanese, were permitted to wear silk.³⁰ In everything else having to do with accommodation, however, Valignano was quite serious in his expectations. One example shows the lengths to which the Visitor expected his Jesuits to go in adapting to Japanese customs:

If a Father fell in with mounted persons of the first, second and third ranks, he had to dismount if they did the same; if they were on foot he was not to remain in the saddle. If he encountered a group of pagan samurai of the fourth class who, on meeting him, sprang to the ground, he, too, was to dismount. The Japanese Superior, however, could remain in the saddle, but he had to remove his hat, draw his foot from the stirrup on the side where they met him, and laying both hands on the front saddle-bow make a reverence to them. When one or two Christians, even though they were samurai, crossed the street, a Father did not need to dismount but, after performing the above ceremonial, could ride on. The irmaos, however, were to dismount and in special circumstances even anticipate them and tender them a special greeting. In pagan localities such ceremonial was a safe course for even a Father to adopt when a lord with a large retinue encountered him on foot.³¹

MASS CONVERSIONS AND NATIVE WORKERS: VALIGNANO AND THE FUTURE OF THE JAPANESE CHURCH

Having decided how the Jesuits would deal with the issue of accommodation, Valignano turned to what he saw as the primary deficiency in the Japanese church, what Ross describes as “the very poor level of spiritual life in the congregations” scattered throughout Japan.³² The church had experienced massive growth over a short period of time, and the fact was that there were far too few Jesuits to minister effectively to these new converts. Valignano was faced with the consequences of mass conversions, and had to decide what course of action to take. Obviously, one

²⁷ Arimichi Eloisawa, “The Meeting of Cultures,” in *Southern Barbarians*, 127.

²⁸ Drummond, *History of Christianity in Japan*, 60.

²⁹ Fujita, *Japan’s Encounter with Christianity*, 90.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 99.

³¹ Ross, *Vision Betrayed*, 64.

³² *Ibid.*, 58.

problem was that people who had converted because their lord compelled them might just as easily recant if a new lord ordered them to do so.³³ This is precisely what happened in Arima province when the Christian *daimyo* there died. As mentioned earlier, his son Haronobu who succeeded him was not a Christian and ordered his subjects to reject their faith. Though some decided to flee Arima rather than recant, many of them apostatized. Then, when that *daimyo* was baptized a few years later, he urged his subjects to once again become Christians, and many of them returned to the faith. Clearly, the sincerity of their faith was in question.³⁴ Commenting on this state of affairs, Valignano wrote that “since the Japanese are so much at the disposal of their lords, they readily become converted when told to do so by their lords and they think it is their wish.”³⁵ The sincerity of the *daimyo* was equally dubious; one striking feature of Cabral’s first decade in Japan was the number of lords who converted in order to gain a part of the Macao trade.³⁶ Their desire to participate in the lucrative foreign trade was understandable. As he traveled throughout Japan, Valignano had been struck by the poverty he saw—even the *daimyo* were poor. Thus, he wrote,

Since they have convinced themselves that [the Portuguese ships] will come to where there are Christians and churches, and whither the padres wish them to come, it therefore follows that many of them, even though they are heathen, seek to get the padres to come thither and to secure churches and converts, thinking that by this means the ships will [in their turn] secure other favors they wish to obtain from the padres.³⁷

Valignano had considered avoiding mass conversions completely, so that the Jesuits could focus on those who had already become Christians. This would have drastically slowed the growth of the mission but his hope was that the Society would be able to consolidate what it had already gained before moving on and making new converts. The Visitor eventually concluded that the mass conversions should be allowed to continue, however, reasoning that they were opportunities that should not be missed. On the other hand, the scarcity of priests meant that the vast majority of Japan’s 130,000 Christians knew almost nothing about their faith. Most did not have access to a catechism, much less someone who could explain it to

³³ Joseph Jennes, *A History of the Catholic Church in Japan: From its Beginnings to the Early Meiji Era (1549-1873)* [Tokyo: Oriens Institute for Religious Research, 1973], 37.

³⁴ Otis Cary, *A History of Christianity in Japan: Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Protestant Missions* [Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1982], 88.

³⁵ Jennes, *History of the Catholic Church in Japan*, 17.

³⁶ Laures, *Catholic Church in Japan*, 84.

³⁷ Jennes, *History of the Catholic Church in Japan*, 17.

them.³⁸ Indeed, in many new Christian communities, “eight or ten months would pass without their seeing a single father.”³⁹

This was not a situation that could be remedied simply by asking for more Jesuits to come to Japan, though many were eager to come. Valignano believed strongly that only the most dedicated, bright and gifted Jesuits should come to the islands; he was not interested in a mass influx of priests.⁴⁰ Yet if mass conversions were to continue, the problem of too few workers ministering to too many Japanese had to be addressed. Because Valignano was determined that only the best Jesuits should come to Japan, he concluded that the Japanese themselves provided the solution. He wanted Japanese converts, ideally drawn from the ranks of the *samurai*,⁴¹ to enter the Society and become priests.⁴² The Jesuits were not united on this question, and the tension would continue throughout the Society’s work in Japan. Cabral believed that if the Japanese were educated and trained, their “haughty spirit . . . would lead them . . . to despise their European teachers.”⁴³ Valignano vehemently disagreed, believing that the *dojuku* were entirely capable of functioning as full members of the Society of Jesus. Further, the Visitor understood that Japanese society itself approved of the gradual improvement of one’s status, and he wanted to make sure that the *dojuku* received the same opportunities as part of the Society.⁴⁴

Valignano was looking to the future and had “concluded the success of Christianity in Japan depended upon the development of an indigenous clergy.”⁴⁵ This went beyond supplementing the ranks of European Jesuits: Valignano’s intent was that the leadership of the Japanese church should eventually pass entirely into Japanese hands. This was an extraordinary goal in an age when missionary efforts were often accompanied by military action and characterized by a disdain for the native people. As Fujita has written, “in the sixteenth century, Valignano was already envisioning the establishment of Christian churches run by the Japanese for the Japanese in a Japanese style—literally a Japanese Catholic Church.”⁴⁶ Valignano’s hopes were the direct result of his firm belief that the Japanese church “was the only Asiatic mission which held any prospect of soon becoming a healthy and self-supporting Christian realm with a trustworthy native clergy of its own.”⁴⁷

Valignano’s aims showed that he viewed the Japanese brothers as equals to the European Jesuits. Unfortunately, under Cabral’s leadership the treatment of

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

³⁹ Dauril Alden, *The Making of an Enterprise: The Society of Jesus in Portugal, its Empire and Beyond, 1540-1750* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996], 62

⁴⁰ Boxer, *Christian Century in Japan*, 80.

⁴¹ The Jesuits had early on discovered that the Japanese peasants were more likely to respond to the foreign religion if it were endorsed by the upper classes.

⁴² Drummond, *History of Christianity in Japan*, 60.

⁴³ Cary, *History of Christianity in Japan*, 92.

⁴⁴ Fujita, *Japan’s Encounter with Christianity*, 75.

⁴⁵ Alden, *Making of an Enterprise*, 62.

⁴⁶ Fujita, *Japan’s Encounter with Christianity*, 89.

⁴⁷ Boxer, *Christian Century*, 80.

the *dojuku* had been anything but equal.⁴⁸ Deep divisions had developed between the Jesuits and the *dojuku* as a direct result of Cabral's policies and prejudices. The *dojuku* had been compelled to follow European customs with regards to food, manners, and dress. Many of these things were repugnant to Japanese sensibilities, and they caused deep humiliation and resentment. Valignano made his opinion of such methods clear: "nothing could be expected from such a condition of affairs but only certain ruin. We live in their territory and without them the Society can neither function nor continue to exist."⁴⁹

Despite Cabral's objections, Valignano moved forward with his plans, and in April 1580, he opened a school in Arima province for the training of *dojuku*. The first year of the school's operation saw twenty-two students attend, all of *samurai* rank, just as Valignano desired.⁵⁰ More schools were opened in the following years, including one in Azuchi, home to one of warlord Oda Nobunaga's castles. In Bungo province, Cabral had been given land so that he could open a school. Though this had occurred in 1576, nothing was done with the land until Valignano arrived, and the seminary there opened in 1580.⁵¹ Valignano's efforts to educate and train the *dojuku* were successful. Each of the three districts of Japan⁵² soon had schools, and the number of *dojuku* increased steadily in the coming years. Between 1580 and 1603 (Valignano's last year in Japan) the *dojuku* grew from 100 to 284.⁵³

Valignano's educational plans would soon include a printing press brought from Europe, which would produce a number of tracts and catechisms, as well as many Western classics. Francis Xavier had written that "a large proportion of the people can read and write, which is a great help in learning prayers and the things of God in a short time."⁵⁴ Like Xavier, Valignano had realized that the near universal literacy of the Japanese meant that teaching and education could be done on a large scale. The immediate result of Valignano's efforts was the creation of an official catechism, which he produced with the help of a Japanese convert named Yohoken Paulo. Valignano came to respect Paulo greatly, and he became the Visitor's personal assistant. Fujita points out that it is not an insignificant fact that this catechism was written by a close team of a Japanese and a European; the primary tool used to teach the Japanese Christians truth was not an exclusively Western tract.⁵⁵

⁴⁸ Fujita, *Japan's Encounter with Christianity*, 89.

⁴⁹ Ross, *Vision Betrayed*, 57.

⁵⁰ Fujita, *Japan's Encounter with Christianity*, 79.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁵² When Valignano arrived, he decided that in order to better organize the Japanese mission, the Society would divide the country into three separate districts, each with their own superior who would oversee their progress. Northwest Kyushu, East Kyushu, and West Honshu. See Laures, *Catholic Church in Japan*, 104.

⁵³ Fujita, *Japan's Encounter with Christianity*, 76.

⁵⁴ Shuma Iwai, "An Analysis of Francis Xavier's Letters from Kagoshima, Japan (1549): His Approaches and Views of Ministry," *Asia Journal of Theology*, 21 [April 2007]: 8.

⁵⁵ Fujita, *Japan's Encounter with Christianity*, 88.

The changes Valignano introduced were completely contrary to the way Cabral had run the mission for the last decade, and he believed that Valignano was making a mistake in believing that the Japanese could be treated as equals. Cabral had nothing but contempt for them and their culture and believed that they must be dealt with severely. Valignano later wrote that “Cabral held that the Japanese . . . if they were to be properly governed . . . needed stern treatment.”⁵⁶ Cabral was also of the opinion that the Europeans needed to make no effort to learn Japanese or understand Japan’s culture. Valignano reported that Cabral burst out laughing at the idea that the Jesuits should—or even could—learn the language.⁵⁷ But the majority of the Jesuits did not share Cabral’s opinions, either of the language or the people of Japan, and they supported Valignano’s reforms enthusiastically. This created something of an awkward situation, for while Valignano did outrank Cabral in the overall Society hierarchy, Cabral held authority over the Jesuits in Japan as the Superior there.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, there was little Cabral could do when so many of those under his authority opposed him in favor of Valignano.

Cabral was furious with Valignano, and when a ship from India brought troubling news about the mission there, he suggested that perhaps the Visitor was needed elsewhere.⁵⁹ The tensions between the two men only increased: in a letter dated 27 October 1580, Valignano wrote to the General of the Society of Jesus concerning the state of affairs in Japan. The Visitor wrote a scathing critique of Cabral and detailed the damage he was doing to the mission. According to Valignano, the mission relied far too much on Cabral’s leadership, the workers were spread far too thinly, and the relationship between the Jesuits and the *dojuku* was breaking down entirely.⁶⁰ Finally, Cabral formally asked Valignano that he relieve him of his post as Superior in Japan. Valignano did so and Cabral left Japan in 1581.⁶¹ In his place, Valignano appointed Gaspar Coelho, who had supported Valignano’s reforms and would himself play an important role in the coming years.

THE ACQUISITION OF NAGASAKI

One of the most important events to take place during Valignano’s residence was the Society’s acquisition of the port of Nagasaki. The once small fishing village had become the center of the Macao trade years earlier, in 1571.⁶² The Portuguese discovered that the harbor was ideal for even their largest ships and began to come

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Kiri Paramore, “Early Japanese Christian Thought Reexamined: Confucian Ethics, Catholic Authority, and the Issue of Faith in the Scholastic Theories of Habian, Gomez, and Ricci,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 35, no. 2 [2008]: 248 n.

⁵⁹ Laures, *Catholic Church in Japan*, 105.

⁶⁰ Ross, *Vision Betrayed*, 57.

⁶¹ Fujita, *Japan’s Encounter with Christianity*, 92.

⁶² Alden, *Making of an Enterprise*, 62.

regularly. It is possible that *daimyo* Omura Sumitada and Jesuit Cosme de Torres had begun making plans for ceding Nagasaki to the Jesuits as early as 1567.⁶³

Sumitada's offer of the port to the Society of Jesus did not mean that he gave up sovereignty over the area; he remained its *daimyo* and still received all of the taxes.⁶⁴ The deal was favorable to both the Jesuits and Sumitada; aside from enriching both parties through participation in the Macao trade, Jesuit control of Nagasaki meant that the Society now had a permanent headquarters from which they would never have to flee. Thus, on 9 June 1580, Omura Sumitada formally gave authority over Nagasaki to the Society of Jesus.⁶⁵ Valignano wrote about the acquisition in August of that year, noting its consequences, both immediate and far-reaching:

The lives and property of our missionaries in Japan are continually exposed to imminent hazard and risk owing to the constant warfare and ups and downs of fortune which prevail. . . . For this reason, all of us who have experience of these parts, considered it very necessary, both for our own sakes as for the spread of Christianity, that we should take charge of the port of Nagasaki which is in the fief of Dom Bartholomew, and whither the Great Ship normally comes. This place is a natural stronghold, and one which no Japanese lord could take by force. Moreover, since it is the port whither the Great Ship comes, anyone who is lord of the soil will be delighted to have the padres there, in order to ensure that the ship does likewise. Altogether it seemed a very desirable place, and one very suitable for the preservation of our property, as also a refuge for personnel when necessary. . . . He, therefore, gave it to us on the sole condition that the ship would pay him an annual due of 1000 ducats, part to be expended on the maintenance of the padres who live in that port and on the fortification of the two said places, and part to be divided amongst the Christian lords. And albeit this may well appear a strange thing in Europe, and something foreign to our institution, withal it seems absolutely vital and necessary to those of us here in Japan who have had local experience. But since the whirligig of time and change may show that it might be advisable in the future, either to return them to their original lord, or to hand them over to the Church if a bishopric is formed later, the Company has received these two places on the condition that they can hand them over even before an answer is received from the father general, if the superior in India should see fit and there is no time to await a written reply from Rome. Nevertheless

⁶³ Pacheco, "Europeans in Japan," in *Southern Barbarians*, 50.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁶⁵ Ross, *Vision Betrayed*, 60.

the lord of the soil gave them to us in perpetuity and virtually unconditionally as regards the Company.⁶⁶

The Jesuit acquisition of Nagasaki was a controversial move, both in Europe and in Japan. The Society in Europe was still concerned about the Jesuit participation in the Portuguese trade, and the Japanese were understandably nervous about one of their ports coming under the control of the foreign priests, becoming “as it were a foreign possession.”⁶⁷ Indeed, years later Nagasaki would be used as an example of supposed Jesuit plans to prepare for a European invasion of Japan.⁶⁸ But among the Jesuits it would eventually be compared to Rome, and nearly all of its population of 25,000 was baptized.⁶⁹

SUCCESS ON THE MAIN ISLAND: VALIGNANO ON HONSHU

After concluding the Nagasaki agreement with Sumitada, Valignano traveled to the capital city of Miyako, to see how the churches on the main island of Honshu were faring under the leadership of Organtino. As he traveled throughout the Gokinai region (the areas surrounding Miyako) in 1581, Valignano was amazed to find vibrant and growing Christian communities: he had seen nothing like them in Kyushu. Between 1577—when Organtino became leader of the Miyako mission—and 1580, the city’s Christian population had grown from 1,500 to 15,000. Further, in this part of Japan, “there had been neither compulsion on the part of the *daimyo* . . . nor were the lords sympathetic to the mission in order to get a share of the Portuguese trade since no Portuguese ships came to Honshu.”⁷⁰ The believers that Valignano met there completely restored his confidence in the Japanese mission; they were proof that strong and enthusiastic Christian communities could indeed take root in the country.

Valignano was aware that the extraordinary success in Honshu was due in large measure to Organtino. Valignano wrote of him that “he is a good religious, virtuous and prudent, with a unique flair for intercourse with the Japanese; he is discerning and clever in employing the proper means of dealing with them.”⁷¹ But it was much more than simply knowing how to “deal” with the Japanese—Organtino

⁶⁶ Boxer, *Christian Century in Japan*, 100-101.

⁶⁷ George Sansom, *A History of Japan, 1334-1615* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961], 348.

⁶⁸ A few of the Jesuits actually suggested to Valignano that conquest was a possible approach to evangelizing Japan, just as had been done in the Indies and Latin America. Their suggestions angered Valignano and he told them that this was not only ill advised, but inconceivable—such an approach would fail utterly in Japan. See Fujita, *Japan’s Encounter with Christianity*, 90. Father Organtino was of the same opinion, and it was one of his firm orders that the Jesuit efforts in the Gokinai region bear no resemblance to the Portuguese colonies. See Ross, *Vision Betrayed*, 62.

⁶⁹ Joao Paulo Oliveira e Costa, “The Brotherhoods (Confrarias) and Lay Support for the Early Christian Church in Japan,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 34, no. 1 [2007]: 77.

⁷⁰ Ross, *Vision Betrayed*, 61.

⁷¹ Fujita, *Japan’s Encounter with Christianity*, 95.

had an extraordinarily deep love for the people and true respect for their culture. In a letter dated 29 September 1577, Organtino wrote to the General of the Society of Jesus, that “your Paternity must not think that they are an uncivilized race; apart from our Christian faith we are vastly their inferiors. Since I have begun to understand their language I have formed the judgment that in general no people are as discerning as they.... If [this nation] submits to the Faith, my opinion is that no church in the world will surpass [that of Japan].”⁷² This was an extraordinary statement for a sixteenth century European to make about a foreign people. Affectionately called “Orugan Bateren”⁷³ by the Japanese who knew him, Fujita calls him “the most loved missionary in pre-modern Japan.”⁷⁴

While in Miyako, Valignano was taken by Organtino to meet Oda Nobunaga, the warlord who had become the most powerful man in Japan. Nobunaga expressed delight in meeting the extremely tall foreigner—Valignano was more than six feet—and spoke with him at great length. Valignano presented Nobunaga with gifts including a gold-framed chair that particularly pleased him.⁷⁵ In return, Valignano was presented with a screen bearing illustrations of Azuchi castle, one of Nobunaga’s most treasured possessions. He had not even offered it to Emperor, when the Son of Heaven requested the screen as a gift.⁷⁶ This was an extraordinary honor and when the other lords saw how extravagantly Nobunaga treated the Jesuits, they all vied for a chance to do the same. Thus, the Society’s work was able to proceed even more smoothly than before.⁷⁷ It was during this audience that Nobunaga gave the Jesuits permission to build their seminary near Azuchi castle, which he would visit regularly.⁷⁸

Nobunaga encouraged Valignano to stay in the capital for several more days, during which Valignano was able to perform Mass for the Easter celebrations, at which many thousands of Christians were present. Their sincere devotion to the Faith greatly encouraged Valignano, who was further convinced that “Japan was the most important mission of the Society of Jesus.”⁷⁹ Valignano left Miyako with his faith in the Japanese mission completely restored and with a clearer sense of the course it should take in the coming years.

In 1582, Valignano felt that he could finally leave Japan for a time, now that the seminaries had been established, Nagasaki was under Jesuit control, and the Society’s finances were beginning to stabilize somewhat.⁸⁰ The problem of a lack of funds still plagued the Jesuits, however, and Valignano decided to travel to Europe

⁷² Ibid., 94.

⁷³ The word *Bateren* came from the Japanese pronunciation of “Padre.” See Ohashi Yukihiro, “New Perspectives on the Early Tokugawa Persecution,” in *Japan and Christianity*, ed. John Breen and Mark Williams [New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc., 1996], 47.

⁷⁴ Fujita, *Japan’s Encounter with Christianity*, 95.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 96.

⁷⁶ Laures, *Catholic Church in Japan*, 106.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ross, *Vision Betrayed*, 62.

⁷⁹ Laures, *Catholic Church in Japan*, 106.

⁸⁰ Alden, *Making of an Enterprise*, 63.

in order to deal with this issue himself.⁸¹ He would not leave Japan alone; he had conceived of an ambitious plan. Four young Japanese men would accompany the Jesuit Visitor back to Europe, representing the various Christian *daimyo* of Kyushu.⁸² Valignano's hope was that by letting the Europeans see the Japanese, there would be greater interest in the Society's work in Japan. Also, he wanted the youths to see for themselves the greatness of European civilization, so that they could describe it to their countrymen once they returned home.⁸³ The plan was thrown together hastily—Valignano apparently devised the idea barely a month before he left Japan—only two of the four young men were related at all to the Christian *daimyo*, and they distantly.⁸⁴ The *daimyo* themselves were only given the briefest of notice; one lord was rather amused when the Jesuits asked his permission to be represented by one of the youths, considering that they had already left Japan.⁸⁵ The youths left Nagasaki with Valignano on 20 February 1582. They arrived in Lisbon 11 August 1584, and their trip throughout Europe was a great success. Everyone they met, from villagers to kings treated the Japanese youths with exceptional warmth.⁸⁶ It would be almost twenty years before they saw their homeland again; in that time, it would change enormously.⁸⁷

CONFERENCE IN NAGASAKI: VALIGNANO PREPARES TO LEAVE JAPAN

Before he left Japan in 1582, Valignano convened a conference in Nagasaki. Although the exact nature of the discussions is unknown, Valignano's purpose seems to have been to outline the policies that the missionaries were to follow while working in Japan and also to discuss the future of the Japanese mission. The meeting ended with several resolutions,⁸⁸ the first of which dealt with the importance of training native clergy. The second resolution outlined the means of accomplishing this training and also discussed the importance of good relations between the Japanese and European clergy, dealing especially with the policy of cultural accommodation. The Jesuits were to do nothing that would repulse their Japanese brothers, such as eating meat or failing to keep their persons and residences clean. Valignano reiterated that while the Jesuits were still required to wear their traditional black cotton garments, no such compulsion was laid on the *dojuku*, who were free to wear their native clothing if they wished.⁸⁹

One resolution remained, which up to this point had not yet been seriously discussed: whether Japan should be made into a bishopric. Valignano pointed out

⁸¹ Ross, *Vision Betrayed*, 67.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Fujita, *Japan's Encounter with Christianity*, 100.

⁸⁴ Elisonas, "Journey to the West," 33.

⁸⁵ Ross, *Vision Betrayed*, 67.

⁸⁶ Fujita, *Japan's Encounter with Christianity*, 102-103.

⁸⁷ The story of the Japanese youths' travels through Europe is recounted thoroughly in Elisonas, "Journey to the West," 27-66.

⁸⁸ Fujita, *Japan's Encounter with Christianity*, 97-98.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 99-100.

that the country's Christian population—now numbering nearly 150,000—was in obvious need of a bishop. Valignano did not, however, want someone who had never been to Japan. He believed that it was vital that the bishop be familiar with Japanese culture and customs, and that he support the policy of accommodation so crucial to success in that country. Japan would not receive a bishop for almost two decades, but Valignano would continue to press the Society to have one appointed.⁹⁰ His real hope was quite extraordinary: for a Japanese to eventually be appointed Superior of the mission.

The last major issue dealt with at Valignano's conference was the problem of finances. Aside from regular expenses, the Jesuits had discovered that one of the most expensive aspects of working in Japan was the custom of giving gifts. The ritual extended to everyone with whom the Jesuits met, whether friend or foe. Visits were expected to conclude with a polite dismissal and the presentation of a gift from the Jesuit hosts.⁹¹ The Jesuits in large cities were constantly visited by those who wanted to meet the foreign priests, and it became an enormous drain on the mission's fund.⁹² What the Society really needed was a sustainable means of income; donations from European kings and the Vatican were irregular and never arrived in the full amount. Besides, Japan was a poor country. Although the Christian *daimyo* and common people gave the Jesuits what they could, their poverty and Japan's political instability meant that the Society could not depend on them consistently.

The only constant that the Society of Jesus could depend upon for funds was the *Kurofune*. Meaning Black Ship (perhaps referring to their color),⁹³ the Portuguese *Kurofune* arrived regularly and was one of the primary reasons that the *daimyo* requested that the Jesuits visit their province. The Japanese were eager for trade not just for silks from China or guns from Portugal, but for almost anything from the West. Oda Nobunaga was fascinated with all things European, occasionally even wearing Western clothes when meeting with his advisors. And of course, the fact that the most powerful warlord in Japan loved European wares meant that they quickly became fashionable. It was not uncommon to see high-ranking Japanese men walking the streets of Miyako in European clothes—complete with codpiece.

Valignano was, of course, well aware of the Japanese desire for trade and in 1578 had arranged a deal that established the Jesuits as official mediators for the European trade in Nagasaki.⁹⁴ But the Jesuits had long been uncomfortable working as trade intermediaries and Valignano had to convince them—along with the Portuguese—that their involvement was not only acceptable, but necessary as a means of funding the mission. The *daimyo* who employed the Jesuits were less

⁹⁰ Ibid., 98.

⁹¹ Boxer, *Christian Century in Japan*, 114.

⁹² Joao Rodrigues has written in detail on the custom of giving gifts in Japan. See *This Island of Japan: Joao Rodrigues' Account of 16th-Century Japan*, trans. and ed. Michael Cooper, S.J. [Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1973], 161-171.

⁹³ Boxer, *Christian Century in Japan*, 93.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 117.

diplomatic than Valignano, “pointing out that it was most ungrateful of the padres to quibble at doing the *daimyo* a favor which cost them nothing, when the said *daimyo* were daily risking their fiefs, honors, and lives through their profession of Christianity.”⁹⁵ Chastened, the Jesuits continued to provide their services, for which they were indeed paid well.

CONCLUSION

After the conference in Nagasaki, Alessandro Valignano left Japan. The Visitor could set out knowing that the mission’s future was much brighter than when he had arrived. Indeed, by 1583, one year after his departure, there were 150,000 Christians in Japan, ministered to by around 500 workers, including *dojuku* and *kambo*.⁹⁶ Because of Valignano’s policies towards Japanese culture and the *dojuku*, the Jesuit mission changed dramatically: it moved towards almost complete cultural accommodation, and the *dojuku* were to be trained with the hope that in later years they would assume leadership of the mission. Valignano saw farther than Cabral, who found nothing admirable in the Japanese which set them apart from any other nation of savages. If Cabral’s policies had continued, the history of the Society of Jesus in Japan would have been quite different.

The number of believers and workers had both increased substantially during his stay, but Valignano’s strategy of accommodation was his greatest legacy in Japan. While the Japanese were generally contemptuous of any *namban*—Southern Barbarians—they treated the Jesuits with respect and honor. This in turn enabled the Jesuits to work in more provinces and gave them access to some of the most powerful lords in all Japan. And if those *daimyo* who received the Jesuits respected them, the message they preached gained credibility. If the message had credibility, the *daimyo* were far more receptive to it, and if the *daimyo* converted, even if he did not compel his people to become Christians, they were far more willing to convert on their own. This was Valignano’s basic approach to evangelism, and it did more than increase the esteem in which the Jesuits were held; it improved the reputation of Christianity itself.

Further, Valignano’s approach to the *dojuku* alleviated a situation that had grown tense and dangerous. If their poor treatment had continued, many of them would have apostatized, which would in turn have demoralize Christians throughout Japan. Cabral had shown mistrust and contempt for a people used to respect and civility. Valignano understood how vital the *dojuku* were to the mission and his belief that the Japanese—alone of all the Eastern peoples—were capable of a native-run, self-sufficient church allowed him to implement his reforms with confidence.

When Valignano first arrived in Japan, he had been shocked at the state of the mission. There were rifts between the European and Japanese workers, most

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 112-113.

⁹⁶ *Kambo* were unofficial, untrained leaders of individual communities of Christians. See Ross, *Vision Betrayed*, 65.

converts had no one to teach them, the Jesuits were exhausted and demoralized, and the future of the mission seemed to be doubtful. After only three years, Valignano left the Society of Jesus in Japan both changed and invigorated. These three short years set the Jesuit mission on the path it would follow for the next thirty. Valignano's policies were rooted in deep respect for the Japanese people and culture and his vision has transformed the faltering, aimless mission into the jewel of Rome's foreign endeavors.

Valignano's example is not for missions alone; all Christians can benefit from understanding the methods that made the Jesuits successful in Japan. They were willing to elevate another culture above their own, to act in ways that were strange and often repulsive. Americans, much like the Japanese, have always been fascinated with foreign cultures. Yet the tendency is to cling to one's culture, to hold it up as the standard by which others are judged. The willingness of the Jesuits to abandon their culture (recall Organtino's words, that he had become "more Japanese than an Italian") might seem strange and almost traitorous to American readers. The Jesuits were willing to do this because of their great love for the Japanese people, whom they valued above any culture. Christians today can benefit from the story of Valignano's endeavors not only for the methods he used, but for the reminder that his work provides: that they belong to a far country, an eternal kingdom, into which the Lord desires that all men should come.

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