

The Spiritual Conversion
of the Americas



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Conversion in Portuguese America

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Introduction

The world of Christianity in colonial Brazil is difficult to render, especially if analyzed from the point of view of religious conversion. First, the variety of the subjects of conversion must be considered. Without taking miscegenation into account, three large broad groups needed integration in the Church: the Portuguese-born colonists and their descendants, the Amerindians, and the African imported populations.

The first Jesuits who arrived in the territory in 1549 were not reluctant to point at the religious faults and ignorance of the white Portuguese-born colonists who had settled there. It must be remembered that at the same time, and especially after the closing of the Council of Trent in 1563, internal missions were a priority of the militant church. If the European religious structures implemented over a millennium were insufficient in Europe, they were almost nonexistent for the Portuguese living in Brazil. As for the black population, the establishment of missions in Africa was virtually impossible because of the climate and the cultural resistance of African populations. Indoctrination was easier to do in Brazil, where the people imported from Africa could not escape the hegemony of the Portuguese, even if the priorities of conversion were undoubtedly concentrated on the Brazilian natives. Even if the results of the conversion of the latter were frustrating, as I show later in this chapter, most religious policies aimed at their conversion and made the other two groups largely secondary in the minds of the missionaries.

Evangelization legitimized the occupation of alien lands by the Portuguese and Spaniards: papal bulls gave them the right, and also the duty, to

Christianize all peoples they came in contact with in the colonized territories. No other European empires had the same obsession about converting other peoples to the Christian faith as did the Portuguese and Spanish.

Up to the creation of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Congregatio de Propaganda Fidei) in 1622, the Portuguese and Spanish Crowns enjoyed the monopoly of religious action in their colonies through the granting of a sequence of privileges issued by the papal court. The papal bulls sanctioned each country's rights over the newly discovered or conquered territories. These prerogatives (known as *padroado* in Portugal and *patronato* in Spain) were formed in the early years of their expansion.¹

The privileges of the Portuguese *padroado* can be summarized as follows: the Crown decided on the building of cathedrals, churches, monasteries, and convents in the new territories. It also presented to the Holy See a small list of candidates to be nominated as archbishops or bishops for the overseas archdioceses and dioceses, as well as appointments to minor positions in the church hierarchy. The Crown also administered ecclesiastical revenues and rejected papal bulls that had not been previously submitted for its approval. All these prerogatives entitled the Crown to collect ecclesiastical taxes that would otherwise be paid to the Roman church.²

The context in which these privileges were given to the Iberian Crowns was easily integrated in the medieval Reconquest. In the formative years of the Portuguese *padroado*, expansion was seen as a crusade against the infidels. Its formation was as inseparable from the Portuguese conquests in Morocco as the conquest of Granada or the occupation of the Canary Islands was to the Spanish *patronato*.

The Portuguese *padroado* and the Spanish *patronato* restricted the Church of Rome's possibilities to develop religious action overseas, but a number of reasons explain why they were formed and why Rome took a number of years to try to correct this situation. In the first place, during the High Renaissance, popes had been absorbed in the amassing of new territories in the Italian peninsula. Second, they lacked organizational devices to implement the pope's authority in the new territories, especially as the Protestant Reformation exploded and the Catholic Church concentrated on recovering lost ground. Third, all the prerogatives that were conceded point to a lack of awareness on the part of the papacy of the importance that the new territories might develop in the future.

The Portuguese *padroado* suffered several setbacks in the East: the Jesuits were expelled from Ethiopia in 1634 and from Japan in 1639; the

empire lost many of its fortresses in India and the island of Ceylon; and finally, the missionaries sent by the Propaganda Fide threatened its hegemony. Nevertheless, in Brazil the *padroado* managed to survive mostly unthreatened, in part because the Crown managed to acquire its entire territory after the expulsion of the French from Maranhão in 1615 and of the Dutch from Pernambuco in 1654. Brazil proved to be one of the more stable Jesuit provinces. The Society arrived in Portuguese America twenty years before settling in Spanish America and had a major role in the whole process of Christianization until the 1750s, despite some competition from other religious orders.⁷

Perceptions of the Indians of Brazil: The Medieval Heritage

Attitudes toward the newly discovered peoples of America were influenced by the medieval cultural heritage. The Portuguese and the Spanish interpreted the life and mores of the Amerindians according to the tradition of demonology.

The medieval evolution of the Greek notion of barbarians had incorporated them with pagans, that is, non-Christians. Drawing mainly from Aristotle, the Thomistic tradition in the Middle Ages viewed non-Christians as living in a dark limbo, without light, faith, or salvation. They were imperfect human beings perpetually fighting one another in endless wars. This view crossed the Atlantic; to Europeans, Amerindians appeared as barbarians, engaged in perpetual fights and cannibal feasts.³ When referring to Brazilian Indians, the Portuguese often used the expression “without law, without king, without God.”

Colorfully painted naked bodies would be seen not only as evidence of the expulsion from Paradise, but also as impersonations of the Devil. Tribal dances became witches’ Sabbaths; different sexual norms were evidence of degenerate devilish behavior; and cannibalism was seen as the ultimate proof of the Indians’ evil nature. To the eyes of the Europeans, Brazil was the kingdom of Satan.

Founded by Saint Augustine, demonology had developed as a specific field of knowledge in the fifteenth century, with landmarks such as Johannes Nider’s *Formicarius* (written between 1435 and 1437) and Jakob Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer’s *Malleus Malleficarum* (1486). Carlo Ginzburg related demonology to the new social construction of witchcraft as practiced by groups of people and not by isolated individuals, as it emerged in the aftermath of the Black Death.⁴ The Renaissance preserved

the belief in the powers of the Devil as the inspiration of superstition, witchcraft, and idolatry: numerous works on the powers of the Devil were published in Europe.

In Portugal, no specific work devoted to demonology was published during the sixteenth century, and only two works of this kind (by Manuel do Vale de Moura and Manuel de Lacerda) were printed in the seventeenth century.⁵ This small production contrasts with contemporary Spanish studies of demonology: between 1510 and 1618, six treaties were published in the sixteenth century and four in the seventeenth century. More than that, Spanish theologians related demonology to Amerindians. To José de Acosta, for example, the Devil had taken refuge in America after having been chased from the Old World with the arrival of Christ.⁶

Nevertheless, other Portuguese sources referred to this world of knowledge, including compilations of laws, jurisprudence, treaties on moral theology, manuals of confession, catechisms, parish priest manuals, sermons, and treaties of medicine. These works have revealed that Portuguese literate elites were familiar with the basic elements of the discipline of demonology, attributing phenomena such as witchcraft to the evil agency of the Devil. There was general agreement on the subject, with little dissent among the various authors.⁷

In Portuguese America, the Devil became the enemy of every missionary, as the source of idolatry: a permanent war was to take place between two opposite worlds, the Christian and the Barbarian. This dispute was present right from the beginnings of colonization. Although the bull *Sublimis Deus* issued by Pope Paul III on 2 June 1537 had established the human nature of Amerindians—proclaiming them capable of being indoctrinated—popular and elite views never stopped considering them as devilish beasts. These perceptions were in sharp contrast with the respect the Portuguese accorded Asian civilizations such as China and Japan.⁸ The fact that the two were empires with visible social stratification, highly developed urban fortified systems, the presence of writing as well as a caste of literate elites, clothing and sophisticated rules of civility, and written laws created a pattern that implied the negative view of Amerindians. The latter were at the lower rank within a scale of values that accorded a higher level to most of the peoples with whom Europeans came in contact, including the Mexicans and the Incas.

The image of the Amerindians was built according to the colonial interests of the Portuguese, especially in what concerns the concept of a “just war” (*guerra justa*). In the terms of the law, the enslavement of the Indians

was forbidden—the bull *Sublimis Deus* and royal decrees forbade it—but there were arguments that justified circumstances when the Portuguese might use the Indians as slaves. According to Beatriz Perrone-Moisés, the concept of a just war, developed in the context of the war against Islam during the Middle Ages, was adjusted in the sixteenth century to be applied to the Amerindians. Legitimate motives to fight against infidels included the refusal of conversion or hostility toward the propagation of the faith, the practice of hostile acts against the Portuguese and their allies, and the breaking of pacts. Portuguese legislation consistently confirmed that the hostility of the Amerindians toward the propagation of faith was a sufficient motive to declare war against the natives.⁹

Even if in theory the situations when war could be declared were restricted, in practice the colonists used this concept as a self-serving device to acquire the workforce they required. This was the case in the highlands of São Paulo, where the colonists and their allies (mainly *mamelucos*) made trips into the interior to fight the Indians, taking the captives to their estates as slaves. These expeditions made a major contribution to the integration of this area into the colonial economy.¹⁰ They tended to be justified a posteriori with the hostility of the Indians, even though that hostility might have originated in previous aggression by the colonists.

The Agents of Christianization

It is hard to measure the efforts of Christianization without knowing who its agents were, how many there were, what goals they had in mind, and how they intended to achieve those goals. Neither is it easy to understand religious action without relating it to changing policies and relationships between the center and the periphery.¹¹ On the one hand, official policies governing evangelization were established by royal decree, as well as by the central administration of the religious orders. On the other hand, missionary action developed according to local dynamics, making it necessary to have in mind the evolution of the relationship between religious orders and the king, between them and their higher institutional authorities, and between colonists and missionaries.

Little is known about the first efforts at evangelization before the arrival of the Jesuits in 1549. Some Franciscans were aboard the fleet of Pedro Álvares Cabral, but there was little institutional interest in Brazil, either lay or ecclesiastical, during the first half of the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, the miscegenation of different ethnic groups started in this

period. A new breed came into being: the *mamelucos*, sons and daughters of the first Europeans to settle in Brazil with the Indian women. The second generation of mixed bloods, daughters and sons of Indians and *mamelucos*, would be designated as *curibocas*.

With the importation of African slaves, the creation of new human types continued throughout the colonial history of Brazil. Four new ethnic categories were formed: *mulattos* (white father with black mother), *pardos* (white father with mulatto mother), *cafusos* (black father and Indian mother), and *cabras* (black father with mulatto mother). Brazilian-born Europeans were called *mazombos*, and second-generation black slaves were known as *crioulos*.¹² Also, different African ethnic groups with different religious backgrounds were brought into Brazil. Ethnic diversity in colonial Brazil was immense, and thus a history of its Christianization must take into account not only the Portuguese, the Amerindians, and the Africans, but also the intermixing of such broad large categories, with very diverse cultural and religious backgrounds.

The Jesuits

The Portuguese Empire was the first field of evangelization of the Jesuits (the order was scarcely two years old when Francis Xavier departed to India), beginning twenty years before their expansion in the Spanish or the French Empire. Historians have stressed the Jesuits' success in the Portuguese colonies, judging them the most successful of all the religious orders that were engaged in evangelization. We do not know, however, to what extent the extensive documentation of their missionary efforts by the Jesuits is responsible for leading scholars to overestimate their success while underestimating the efforts of those orders that did little to record their work for posterity. Moreover, in the whole Portuguese Empire, Brazil remains the area where the dominant role of the Jesuits remains unquestioned for the entire colonial period. They were the first religious order to arrive there and remained the most important until the 1750s, just before their expulsion from Portugal in 1759.

Significantly, the first six Jesuits arrived in Brazil in the same vessels that bore the new governor Tomé de Souza and a thousand men, with royal orders to build the city of the Saviour of Bahia, the capital of the colony. This group of Jesuits included the famous Manuel da Nóbrega, who would be its first mission superior, and provincial from 1553 to 1560. By 1570, another thirty-seven Jesuits had arrived from Portugal, joining forty-five men recruited locally.

Right from the first years in Brazil, the Jesuits helped the Portuguese Crown to gather new territories for the colony. This first contingent of Jesuits is supposed to have helped in the victory over the French in Fort Coligny and the subsequent founding of Rio de Janeiro. Also, they went farther south, to São Vicente, and then moved to the interior, to São Paulo de Piratininga, where they created a mission that would give birth to the city of São Paulo.¹³

By the end of the sixteenth century the province had opened three colleges: in Bahia, Rio de Janeiro, and Olinda. During the second half of the seventeenth century, after the expulsion of the Dutch from Pernambuco, a new expansion period followed, with an increase of the number of Jesuits and five new colleges (Santos, Espírito Santo, Recife, São Luís do Maranhão, and Belém do Pará).¹⁴

The first twenty years of the presence of the Jesuits in Brazil saw a major transformation in the methods of evangelization. Traveling missions were replaced by fixed settlements that included the residence, the college, and the *aldeia* (Indian village). The residence was a housing facility for the members of the order, while the college was used either in the teaching of the local elites or in the formation of recruits. Neither of these structures was concerned with evangelization of the Indians; the *aldeias* provided a fixed basis for conversion. Instead of traveling to indoctrinate, the Jesuits persuaded the Indians to settle in villages where a residing small group of Jesuits indoctrinated them. The increase in the number of these *aldeias* became possible with the amazing success of the Society, whose number of members did not cease to grow until the expulsion of the order (see table).

There were two separate provinces, one with Bahia as capital and the other in northeastern Brazil, Maranhão, formed after the expulsion of the French from the mouth of the Amazon. In the single province of Brazil, the Society's personnel would increase from 6 in 1549 to 169 in 1600. The next century would see a slow growth in its first half, only to increase again in the second half. By its last decade, there would be over three hundred Jesuits in the Brazil province and nearly five hundred in the years that preceded their expulsion. The province of Maranhão was to grow mainly during the eighteenth century, surpassing a hundred Jesuits in the 1730s (see table).

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that all of this staff was concerned with missionary action: many individuals were teachers in the Society's colleges or administrators in the bureaucratic machine and did

Number of Jesuits in Portuguese America (1549–1760)

Year	Brazil	Maranhão	Total
1549	6	—	6
1558	25	—	25
1568	61	—	61
1584	40	—	140
1600	169	—	169
1606	176	—	176
1610	165	—	165
1631	176	—	176
1641	159	—	159
1654 ^a	162	26 ^b	188
1664	—	11 ^b	—
1679	188	34	222
1683	252	—	—
1690	—	54	—
1694	310	—	—
1716	324	—	—
1720	—	64	—
1722	367	69 ^b	436
1730	—	102	—
1732	362	118	480
1735	417	117	534
1738	423	—	—
1741	431	—	—
1743	447	—	—
1748	471	—	—
1751	—	148	—
1753	—	136	—
1757	476	—	—
1760	—	155	—

Source: Alden, *The Making of an Enterprise*, pp. 674–676.

a. The second wave of Jesuit missions in the State of Maranhão took off in 1652, after a first attempt in the 1640s.

b. The estimates for Maranhão are for the years 1655, 1663, and 1723.

not leave the urban centers. Charlotte de Castelnau-L'Estoile has shown that of 164 Jesuits listed in the 1598 catalogue, only 34 were concerned with the Christianization of the Indians. More than that, missionaries living in the *aldeias* were subaltern in relation to the urban ones, whose skills in theology or preaching ensured them the possibility of making the fourth vow (obedience to the pope), so that they might ascend to the

higher posts in Jesuit hierarchy. The strictly missionary ones tended to be recruited in Brazil because of their linguistic proficiency. This analysis has also shown that the order lost much of its international character in Brazil: 86 percent of the missionaries were born either in Portugal or in the colony.¹⁵

The Changing Policies of Conversion

Debate about the strategies of conversion appeared during the first decade of the presence of the Jesuits in Brazil. Padre Manuel da Nóbrega favored military dominance over the Amerindians as a precondition of any efforts at conversion.¹⁶ This policy, elaborated in 1556 and 1557, was radically opposed to the position of Bartolomé de Las Casas, who advocated peaceful means of religious proselytism. For Nóbrega, the policy seems to have been a response to the disappointments of his experience as a missionary, which had revealed the difficulties of making the natives truly understand the Christian faith. José de Anchieta, another Jesuit missionary, also supported the forced grouping of Amerindians in villages.

The first itinerant missions were replaced by fixed settlements with living-in missionaries, the *aldeias*.¹⁷ This change required an alliance between the Order and the Crown, whose army was summoned to collaborate in the removal of the Indians from their original villages to the territories where the *aldeias* were to be found. Often, such villages were placed in strategic positions, as the Indians tended to be involved either in the construction of the colony's territory or in its defense. Most of the time, these villages were used as a frontier between areas dominated by the whites and enemy tribes, or even other Europeans settling in Brazil.

It has become a classical issue to compare the Jesuits' indifference toward African slavery with their protection of the Indians. Nevertheless, according to the logic of slavery until the eighteenth century, it was not forbidden to own slaves if they had been enslaved in a "just war" or as long as one was not responsible for their enslavement. Although Africans were, at least in theory, already slaves when the Portuguese took them, the justifications for fighting and enslaving Amerindians were not always recognized as legitimate.

This distinction was useful in economic terms, because the missionaries were as involved in the plantation economy as were the other colonists. They became owners of large estates, either raising cattle or, after the beginning of the seventeenth century, owning sugar plantations, where they used slaves as a workforce.

Nevertheless, "conversion" did not imply that the converts would be transformed into the equals of the Portuguese colonists. Indians were always the subjects of domination, never rising to posts in either the church or the civil hierarchy. As to the Africans, António Vieira (1608–1697), the most influential Jesuit who condemned the slavery of Amerindians, judged them as having at least gained eternal salvation. Blacks had been slaves in Africa, where they lived in hell; in Brazil their body would be still imprisoned while their soul was freed through baptism. The only recommendation of Vieira was that their owners treat them Christianly.¹⁸

The protection the Jesuits conceded to the Indians living in their villages was in itself a colonial project that clashed with the ambitions of the white colonists. The Jesuits wanted to restrict as much as possible the colonists' interference in the *aldeias*, especially the possibility of their claiming Indians to add to the workforce on their rural estates. Until the suppression of the Brazilian missions in 1760, the Jesuits were a colonial power and often fought against bishops or royal representatives.

An Enterprise or a Bureaucratic Organization?

Some recent work on the Jesuits has questioned the nature of this religious order. Dauril Alden, in a comprehensive book on the assistancy of Portugal, has viewed the Society as an enterprise because of its economic autonomy.¹⁹ The idea that missions should be self-supporting led to their economic autonomy. By contrast, Charlotte de Castelneau L'Estoile has termed it a bureaucratic organization: an institution with a defined hierarchy, in which communication between the center (Rome) and the periphery produced a large amount of paperwork that was central to decision making among its members. This author drew attention to the specificity of the religious project of the Jesuits, whose main goal was conversion and not economic growth.²⁰

It is difficult to choose between these two views, which do not seem incompatible (even if to refer to the Society as an enterprise in the contemporary sense seems anachronistic). On the one hand, it is difficult to deny the pragmatic sense of the Jesuits, even if controversial decisions such as becoming estate owners in Brazil finally won over their detractors. It is a fact that by the eighteenth century most Jesuit centers were provided with supporting sugar estates.²¹ On the other hand, it seems that the control from the center was not always overwhelming and that many directives from above were adjusted to local circumstances, even at the cost of some disagreement between the province and Rome. Also, decision making from

the center was not always predominant, and Jesuit provinces managed to present some controversial innovations as facts, even before Rome could put up obstacles to them. Such was the case with the creation of the *aldeias*, presented to Rome as *faits accomplis*, a result of the agency of the Jesuits in Brazil together with the governor Mem de Sá, who was then the representative of the political power in the colony.²²

Other Religious Orders

Until 1581, the Jesuits appeared to be in charge of the evangelization of the Indians as natural allies to royal colonization. This decade, however, saw the rise of antagonism between the royal governor, Manuel Teles Barreto (1583–89), and the order.²³ This same decade is marked by the arrival of other religious orders such as the Benedictines, the Carmelites, and the Franciscans. It must be noted, however, that except for the Franciscans, these were not missionary orders. The Franciscans became the second religious order concerned with the conversion of the Indians and, like the Jesuits, attracted the enmity of colonists by preaching against Indian slavery.²⁴

The Secular Ecclesiastical Frame: Bishopricks and Parishes

The increasing importance of Brazil led to the creation of the See of Bahia in 1551, two years after the first governor appointed by the king, Tomé de Sousa, started to build the city of Salvador. In 1676, Bahia was elevated to the metropolitan See of Brazil, in the same year that two new Brazilian dioceses were created: Rio de Janeiro and Olinda. A third new diocese would be created the following year in Maranhão. The diocese of Angola (created in 1596) was placed under the authority of Bahia in 1677, thus confirming the close ties between the two areas, which were linked by the slave trade. During the eighteenth century the dioceses of Pará (1719), Mariana, São Paulo, and Goiás (all founded in 1745) would follow.

The difference between the number of dioceses created in the Americas up to 1800 by each Iberian Empire is striking: seven in Brazil against forty-one in Spanish America. Even if one takes into account the larger areas controlled by Spain in the continent, it is a fact that the episcopal grid was tighter in the Spanish *patronato*. More than that, this grid was already in place by 1620, counting thirty-five dioceses by then, while Bahia was the only Brazilian diocese until 1676.²⁵

Religious action on the part of the episcopal structures was far from

being as influential as the one provided by the Jesuits and other religious orders. The dioceses did not develop missionary activities, religious training of future ecclesiastics being largely in the hands of the Jesuits well into the eighteenth century, and the confraternities of the *Misericórdia* fulfilled most charitable institutional duties. There were neither universities nor printing presses in Brazil, and this must have also limited the influence of the prelates. The only synod to take place in the entire colonial period was in Bahia, in 1707, which had as an outcome the publication (in Lisbon) of the only synodal constitutions edited in Brazil.²⁶ Bishops in Brazil limited themselves to diocesan visitations, rarely venturing out to the wilderness (except for the Amazonian expeditions of two bishops of Pará, D. Frei João de São José Queirós and D. Frei Caetano Brandão, in the 1760s and 1780s).

The Portuguese Crown was neither generous nor efficient in giving back to the ecclesiastical institutions the *dízimos* (church tax) it had collected on behalf of the Portuguese *padroado*. Certainly they had the obligation to fund religious action, but one can well understand why religious orders such as the Jesuits were always eager to have their autonomous sources of income, as referred to earlier in this chapter.

As a result, few parishes were created in Brazil. In the first century of the Portuguese colonization, the number of parishes did not exceed fifty; during the next century ninety were added; and in the first seventy-five years of the eighteenth century, after the gold rush in Minas Gerais, more than four hundred new ones were erected. There were single parishes almost as vast as metropolitan Portugal.²⁷ Many of these parishes were funded not by the *padroado* but by the community. The *paróquias coladas* (parishes created by the king, paid by the royal treasury) were rare, and bishops took the initiative of creating *paróquias encomendadas*. They would assign these parishes a priest, who would be remunerated by the parishioners themselves. Payments could include the payment of a tax known as *conhecença* (personal voluntary offerings on the occasion of the ministering of sacraments and also alms collecting during religious services).²⁸

The weakness of the secular church structure explains in part why religious orders such as the Jesuits were so important in Brazil, although this can be viewed also as a cause-effect relationship. But this gap was also filled with private religious chapels, for example, the ones in rural estates such as the *engenhos* (sugar plantations) or cattle farms, which were financially more rewarding to priests than parishes. Also, collective structures such as

confraternities and Third Orders helped to compensate for the failures of the parochial structure. These private religious structures created a domestic religion, often rural and distinct in character from that of the cities, where secular ecclesiastic official structures prevailed. Despite administrative difficulties in obtaining the permit to erect a private chapel, once the chapel was created the chaplains responded to their local masters, such as the boards of confraternities or the owners of the rural estates. Whenever both structures coexisted (parish and confraternity or private chapel) there were constant conflicts over the monopoly of the religious cult.

Private chapels and confraternities were fundamental in the development of Brazilian popular devotion. Everyday religion included also a segregation of spaces, as churches and chapels tended to avoid interracial mixing; whites preferred to have their own spaces either in churches or chapels. Some of the chapels of the sugar plantations would have a small room opposite the sacristy, where the members of the owning family, especially women, could attend mass without being seen. The number of domestic oratories was also high, and those allowed the diversification of private devotion to favorite saints, as well as personal (and less orthodox) cult forms.²⁹

The Inquisition

Created by the pope in 1536 at the request of John III, the Portuguese Inquisition was never established in Brazil, in contrast with Spanish America, where there were inquisitions in Lima (after 1570), Mexico (1571), and Cartagena (1610). This does not mean that the inquisition did not make its presence felt in Brazil, however. The territory was under permanent surveillance. Several detection systems for deviant behavior were installed, and the accused would be sent to Lisbon, where they would be tried and sentenced. The first of such devices were inquisitorial visitations, in which inspection teams from the Lisbon Holy Office were sent to Brazil. The first covered the areas of Bahia and Pernambuco and took place between 1591 and 1595. There were similar visitations in this decade to the Azores, Madeira, and Angola. Other inquisitorial visitations in Brazil followed in the seventeenth century, although proceedings were published only for the one that occurred between 1618 and 1621.³⁰ After 1637 such visits were interrupted in Brazil as well as in Portugal because of their high cost in a context of a decade of political and economic crisis during the reign of Philip III, which was prolonged during the Restoration war (1640–

68).³¹ Also, a network of alternative control systems was put in place to inspect the colony's orthodoxy, which made such visitations by the metropolitan inquisition superfluous. The cooperation between the inquisition and the bishops was much improved, with the organization of diocesan visitations that paid due attention to deviant behavior, especially after the issuance of regulations by the Synodal Constitutions of 1707.³²

The emphasis of the inquisitorial accusations was not on matters of doctrinal orthodoxy but on sexual behavior. The colony had enjoyed a reputation for loose mores since the first Jesuits reported on the habits of the white colonists. In matters of religious practices, authors have reported on their heterodoxy, that is, the gray frontier between licit and illicit piety, as well as the Brazilian clergy's indifference to superstitious practices, marked by the juxtaposition of different cultural universes.³³ The inquisitorial accusations were not directed at the African populations, New Christians, or native populations. "Sexual offenses" (such as sodomy, fornication, and bigamy) perpetrated by Old Christians were the main crimes prosecuted.³⁴

Confraternities and Religious Life

Confraternities represented the adherence of the local populations to Catholicism. They were an expression of the religiosity of the laity, linking formal ecclesiastical structures to communities of believers. They encouraged the practice of everyday religious life and made sure that the events in the ritual calendar were duly celebrated. Confraternities proved to be the most efficient religious institutions at the local level: they organized processions; arranged for the building of churches and maintenance of religious equipment; ensured the payment of priests for the regular cure of souls; and provided the locals with a sense of social importance through membership. They were the only religious structures available in the mining area of Minas Gerais, where religious orders were forbidden by the king. The urge to tax every pound of gold extracted in the area on behalf of the Crown had led the monarchy to deny authorization for the building of convents and monasteries there. Two motives accounted for this decision: first, religious orders would have been financially dependent upon the Crown, as was every religious structure of the *padroado*; second, convents and monasteries would inevitably attract pious donations and bequests from the populations.

In northeastern Brazil, the chapels of the "*engenhos*" fulfilled similar

functions, providing spiritual services both to slave masters and to their workers. Private arrangements and associations created under the initiative of the local populations (even if under the auspices of the local religious orders) were at times more important locally than parishes. Confraternities allowed the populations to compensate for the weak religious structures set up by the *padroado régio*.

Strictly hierarchical and discriminating in their requirements for membership, there were confraternities to match virtually any social situation, and the number of confraternities to which each person was able to belong was a sign of distinction. From the Misericórdias to the Third Orders, limited strictly to local white elites, one could find confraternities for almost every social or ethnic group in Brazil. More than ensuring the celebration of weekly masses or the receiving of sacraments, they made religious cult a part of daily life in the colony.

The world of confraternities was strictly hierarchical. At the top were the confraternities of the Misericórdia and the Third Orders of the Carmelites and Franciscans, which forbade admission to nonwhites and where membership was a privilege of the rich and wealthy: merchants and businessmen, estate owners, royal officials. Beneath them, but also meant for white men, were the confraternities of the Santíssimo Sacramento, Nossa Senhora da Conceição, and São Miguel e Almas. Significant differences existed among these three groups of religious associations.

The Misericórdias were lay confraternities for white men, under royal protection, enjoying preeminence either in local power or in the practice of institutional charity, often administering major hospitals and *recolhimentos*³⁵ (conservatories for women in which they were secluded but did not take vows, and could leave the premises). Their patrimony was based upon the accumulation of pious legacies and circulated on the money market to finance sugar crops or other financial needs, mostly of the elites who integrated them.

The Third Orders recruited their members in the same social strata, often overlapping with the Misericórdias but with significant differences: Misericórdias were *numerus clausus* confraternities, whereas Third Orders did not limit the number of members. The latter also admitted women, a situation that contrasted with most existing confraternities. Members of the Third Orders were particularly concerned with daily devotion, and brothers took vows after a period of novitiate. In fact, they attempted to imitate the life of the religious order to which they were attached, functioning as lay branches to the religious orders that patron-

ized and tutored them. In Bahia, they made available the more prestigious burial grounds to the wealthy.

Confraternities such as Santíssimo Sacramento, Nossa Senhora da Conceição, and São Miguel e Almas were typically post-Tridentine, often were attached to a parish, and were concerned with the organization of daily religious life, as well as liturgical feasts. In spite of being meant for white men, they were not as elite as the Third Orders or the Misericórdias.

In Brazil, confraternities were particularly important to the African populations, both slaves and freedmen. They provided a means by which some autonomy for the black and mulatto populations and control by the white colonists could be negotiated. In fact, whites were ever present as part of black confraternities, sometimes as members of the directing boards and other times as patrons. Such confraternities could group individuals of African origin according to their color (black and mulatto tended to go to separate confraternities).³⁶ African slaves gathered in the confraternities of Our Lady of the Rosary, Santa Ifigénia, and São Benedito; *crioulos*, mulattos, and freedmen joined the *irmandades das Mercês*; *pardos* joined the brotherhoods of São Gonçalo Garcia. Nevertheless, this typology is only indicative, because even if their regulations (*compromissos*) prescribed admission to certain groups, membership practices were more permissive; a confraternity for black Africans might, for example, include *crioulos*, mulattos, and freedmen.

The grouping of Africans could go as far as constituting different confraternities according to African ethnic origin. This was the case in Rio de Janeiro and Bahia, even if in other areas such as Minas Gerais several different ethnicities were admitted in the same confraternity. In this region, the confraternities of the Rosary included mixed-origin slaves, with a variety of both Sudanese and Bantu ethnicities.³⁷

Women and Religion

Religion in the empire was a male business, as was nearly every aspect of colonial life. The few women of Portuguese origin who existed in the different parts of the empire were urged to enter the marriage market. Lack of Portuguese brides was genuine, but perhaps not the longing of Portuguese males for white women, for these men found plenty of women locally. Also, for inheritance reasons, most parents wished to place their daughters in convents and did so by sending them to Portugal.

Convents for women in the Portuguese colonies were few and founded

late, because the policy of the Crown was to delay their establishment as much as possible. There were only three foundations in the seventeenth century: Santa Monica in Goa in 1606, the barefoot Carmelites of Macao in 1633, and the Poor Clares of the Desterro in Bahia in 1677. It is significant that in the Spanish Empire, by the 1620s, there were already thirty-six convents for women, fifteen of those located in Mexico City. The difference in the number of female convents in the two empires can be explained in the patterns of colonial emigration. The Spaniards tended to emigrate with their wives and were encouraged to do so by the Crown, whereas Portuguese men left Portugal alone, either as single men or leaving their wives and children behind. Nevertheless, the foundation of convents was much desired by the colonial Portuguese elites, who constantly applied to Lisbon for authorization to erect them.

The policy of the Crown, however, was to reduce the number of convents as much as possible and delay as long as possible their foundation. This policy resulted in the sending of daughters of colonists to the metropolitan convents, a practice that the Crown tried to forbid in 1732.³⁸ The will to found convents can be explained either in the inheritance strategies that favored the exclusion of some women from the marriage market or in the undeniable attraction that the status of nun and the ideals of sainthood exerted upon women.

The alternative to placing women in cloisters was the *recolhimento*, which allowed the cloistering of women according to monastic rules without the requirement of taking vows. The *recolhimentos* were convenient because they permitted women (if sometimes only in theory) to reenter the marriage market and because the Crown was not so restrictive about their foundation. In practice, most *recolhimentos* in Brazil became surrogate convents, and life inside their walls was not much different from classic female withdrawal from the world.³⁹

Despite the opposition of the Crown, the number of convents and *recolhimentos* increased during the eighteenth century. In the preceding century, there had been only the previously mentioned Clarists of the Desterro in Bahia and two *recolhimentos*, one in São Paulo and the other in Olinda. However, another five convents were created in Brazil in the second third of the eighteenth century: two in Bahia (Lapa and Mercês), two in Rio de Janeiro (Ajuda and Santa Teresa), and one in São Paulo. As to the number of foundations of *recolhimentos*, they mounted to eight: four in Bahia, two in Minas Gerais, two in Pernambuco, and another in Maranhão.⁴⁰

A low participation of women of Portuguese origin in the public activities of confraternities can be expected, although few studies on the subject have been published. Women were not welcome outside the domestic sphere, except for attending the mass at church, and even so, women of high status would travel to churches in coaches and litters that concealed them from public exposure. As for devotional activities organized by confraternities, one can suspect white women of being honorary sisters (mostly through widowhood) of elite confraternities such as the Misericórdias rather than active participants. Nevertheless, in Brazil, white women could enter the Third Orders as members (and not just as representatives of a deceased husband or father) and participate actively in their devotional life. However, even though these women could attain some leadership positions over other female members, male tertiaries monopolized the higher posts in the directing hierarchy.

The religious sphere of women was thus preferably either domestic or reclusive (and tightly controlled by men, such as the episcopal hierarchy or the confessors). Some devout women who did not enter a *recolhimento* or a convent developed forms of religious living inside their homes. Even if women chose not to go to that extreme, the existence of private chapels and oratories provided women with secluded religious structures that entertained their devotion, a devotion that could not have been as orthodox as the Church of Rome would have wished for. The case of Rosa Maria Egipcíaca da Vera Cruz is illustrative: an African woman, an ex-prostitute, claimed that the Jesus child came every day to her house and combed her hair, and she reciprocated by breastfeeding him.⁴¹

Conclusions

No one gives up entirely a previous identity, religious or social, just by the fact of being indoctrinated. Missionaries were aware that the process of conversion would take several generations, and they were often discouraged by meager short-term results. Conversion was accompanied by the acquisition of Christian modes of living, which implied covering genitals with clothes, adopting monogamous heterosexuality, or giving up cannibal feasts. Numerous obstacles made Christianization a difficult goal. There was passive and active resistance by Indians who would not give up their frames of thought or simply replace them with new ones. The tendency was to juxtapose different systems of belief and forms of behavior that were often contradictory. Despite the Jesuit tradition of producing a litera-

ture of propaganda concerning the success of missions, recently explored sources have revealed the utmost discouragement of most mission superiors, who named Brazil the “barren vineyard” and accused the Indians of believing without faith and thus of being virtually incapable of assimilating the Christian message.⁴²

Even the children, whom the Jesuits considered the best converts, remained in contact with their communities and did not give up their culture entirely. Also, one of the fears of the Jesuit administrators was the acculturation of isolated missionaries to the Indian culture, a sea of difficulties that implied a hard-to-solve contradiction: missions might be sterile and the conversion work difficult to perform and dangerous to the salvation of the missionaries, but it legitimized the presence of the order in Brazil. Missionizing represented the purpose of the Society itself, whose conversion project was at the basis of its very existence and spread across the continents.

One episode illustrating the intricate weaving of different religious cultures that emerged as the result of missionary action is the *santidade* of Jaguaripe, studied by Ronaldo Vainfas in *A Heresia dos Índios. Mamelucos, fugitive slave Amerindians and Africans*, and even Portuguese colonists participated in a hybrid religious cult in Jaguaripe, a frontier territory in Bahia. The cult (1580–85) included a mixture of elements of Jesuit doctrine, as apprehended by Indians and *mamelucos*, with Amerindian traditional religious ceremonies; it incorporated millenarian expectations, as the followers were promised a land without evil and the enslavement of the whites. Strategic moves from an ambitious landowner, Fernão Cabral de Taíde, aided by the *mamelucos*, attracted this community of fugitives to his *engenho*. Reactions of other landowners, whose Amerindians and African slaves had fled to the *santidade*, were followed by the intervention of the governor, Teles Barreto, who put an end to the rebellion at the command of a military expedition in 1585. Vainfas rightly assumed this episode to be proof of the active resistance by the colonized to the presence of the white colonists, including the Jesuits. It is also significant that several white persons, starting with Fernão Cabral and his wife, paid respect to the cults performed in the *santidade* of Jaguaripe, demonstrating the gap between popular and elite religion.⁴³

The subjects of conversion cannot be seen as passive objects. For example, there is the case of the Indian tribes who chose an alliance with the colonizers to fight their common enemies. Less evident is the situation in which Amerindians negotiated between what the missionaries were trying

to teach them and the issues they chose to believe, or the interpretations they gave to the new Catholic rituals they performed. For obvious reasons, and as a measure of their subaltern position, their motivations and strategies have left few traces. I know of no account of an Indian (albeit Christianized) having left a record of his or her encounters with the Portuguese missionaries.

Religious practices proved to be less sensitive to the frontiers between licit and illicit practices than they were in Europe, the latter having been practically ignored by the clergy.⁴⁴ Private chapels, especially in the sugar plantations, were the rule, and the role of parish priests was often precarious, especially in areas that were later integrated into the colonial economy. As a result, the populations enjoyed less surveillance from the ecclesiastical authorities, and their devotional practices included a great degree of unorthodox behavior.

As to the Indians, it is to be expected that the full success of their conversion depended on their full integration into the colonial society. But Indians in Brazil were as devastated by epidemic mortality as were native populations elsewhere in America. In the long run, the missions contributed to the destruction of the overwhelming majority of tribes, either physically or culturally.

Notes

1. In 1433 the Portuguese king, D. Duarte, was already granting spiritual jurisdiction over the Madeira Islands to the Order of Christ, and in 1455 the bull *Romanus Pontifex* recognized the Crown's rights to rule spiritual matters in the newly discovered territories. The Spaniards started their efforts in papal court to obtain the same prerogatives in the 1480s, in the context of the fight against Spanish Muslims and the colonization of the Canary Islands. Only in 1508 did Jules II grant the bull *Universalis Ecclesiae*, which enabled the Spanish Crown to rule spiritual matters in the Americas.

2. Cf. C. R. Boxer, *The Church Militant and Iberian Expansion* (Baltimore, 1978), chap. 3.

3. Ronald Raminelli, *Imagens da colonização: A representação do Índio de Caminha a Vieira* (Rio de Janeiro, 1996), 53–55.

4. Carlo Ginzburg, *História Nocturna: Uma decifração do Sabat* (Lisbon, 1995), 77.

5. Manuel do Vale de Moura, *De incantationibus seu ensalmis* (Évora, 1620); Manuel de Lacerda, *Memorial e antídoto contra os pós venenosos que o Demônio inventou e per seus confederados espalhou, em odio da christandade* (Lisbon, 1631).

Cf. José Pedro Paiva, *Bruxaria e superstição num país sem "caça às bruxas," 1600–1774* (Coimbra, 1997), 15–80.

6. Cf. Laura de Mello e Souza, *Inferno Atlântico: Demonologia e colonização, séculos XVI–XVIII* (São Paulo, 1993), 13–46. See also José de Acosta, *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias* ed. Jane E. Mangan, trans. Frances M. Lopez-Morillas (Durham, N.C., 2002).

7. José Pedro Paiva, *Bruxaria*, 15–80.

8. Raminelli, *Imagens da colonização*, 148–52.

9. Cf. Beatriz Perrone-Moisés, "Aldeados, aliados, inimigos e escravos: Lugares dos índios na legislação portuguesa para o Brasil," *Congresso Luso-Brasileiro "Portugal-Brasil: Memórias e Imaginários."* *Actas* (Lisbon, 2000), vol. 1, 147–64.

10. John Monteiro, *Negros da Terra: Índios e bandeirantes nas origens de São Paulo* (São Paulo, 1994), 209.

11. Charlotte de Castelnau-L'Estoile, *Les Ouvriers d'une vigne stérile: Les Jésuites et la conversion des Indiens au Brésil, 1580–1620* (Paris, 2000).

12. Jorge Couto, *A construção do Brasil* (Lisbon, 1995), 312–13.

13. On the first 21 years of the Jesuits in Brazil, cf. Jean-Claude Laborie, ed., *La mission jésuite du Brésil: Lettres et autres documents (1549–1570)* (Paris, 1998), 7–62.

14. Dauril Alden, *The Making of an Enterprise: The Society of Jesus in Portugal, Its Empire, and Beyond, 1540–1750* (Stanford, 1996), 71–75, 218–26.

15. Castelnau-L'Estoile, *Les Ouvriers d'une vigne stérile*, cf. 197–98, 199–256, and 183.

16. See *Cartas do Brasil e mais escritos do P. Manuel da Nóbrega Opera Omnia*, introduction by Serafim Leite (Coimbra, 1955).

17. Castelnau-L'Estoile, *Les Ouvriers d'une vigne stérile*, 108.

18. José Oscar Beozzo, "500 Anos de Evangelização," *Extensão* 2, no. 3 (1992): 33–45.

19. Alden, *The Making*, ix.

20. Castelnau-L'Estoile, *Les Ouvriers d'une vigne stérile*, 19, 235.

21. Alden, *The Making*, map 3.

22. Castelnau-L'Estoile, *Les Ouvriers d'une vigne stérile*, 107.

23. Castelnau-L'Estoile, *Les Ouvriers d'une vigne stérile*, 257.

24. Caio Boshi, "As Missões no Brasil," in F. Bethencourt and K. Chaudhuri, eds., *História da Expansão Portuguesa* (Lisbon, 1998), vol. 2, 396–402.

25. José Pedro Paiva, "Pastoral e evangelização," in João Francisco Marques and António Camões Gouveia, eds., *História Religiosa de Portugal* (Lisbon, 2000), vol. 2, 283.

26. *Constituições primeiras do Arcebispado da Bahia feitas e ordenadas pelo illustrissimo e reverendissimo senhor D. Sebastião Monteiro da Vide, Arcebispo* (Lisbon, 1765).

27. Guilherme Pereira das Neves, *Dicionário da História da Colonização Portuguesa no Brasil* (Lisbon, 1994), 22–23.

28. Eduardo Hoornaert, ed., *História da Igreja no Brasil*, 4th ed. (São Paulo, 1992), vol. 2, pt. 1, 284–85; Cristina de Cássia Pereira Moraes, “Faço o que Vossa Mercê manda, mas olha o que eu faço. . . . Um estudo sobre a religiosidade na constituição da sociedade em Goiás—1736–1770,” *Congresso Luso-Brasileiro “Portugal-Brasil: Memórias e Imaginários.” Actas* (Lisbon, 2000), vol. 1, 174.

29. Luis Mott, “Cotidiano e Vivência Religiosa: Entre a Capela e o Calundu,” in Laura de Mello e Souza, ed., *História da Vida Privada no Brasil* (São Paulo, 1997), vol. 1, 161–220.

30. Ronaldo Vainfas mentions three other inquisitorial visitations, although they do not seem to involve the appointment of Portuguese inquisitors travelling to Brazil, having been performed by local ecclesiastics. Two of them took place in 1627 (one to Pernambuco and the other to the south), and the third one in 1646. Vainfas, *Trópico dos Pecados: Moral, sexualidade e Inquisição no Brasil*, 2d ed. (Rio de Janeiro, 1997), 225.

31. See Francisco Bethencourt, “A Inquisição,” in João Francisco Marques and António Camões Gouveia, eds., *História Religiosa de Portugal* (Lisbon, 2000), vol. 2, 95–131.

32. Caio César Boschi, “As visitas diocesanas e a Inquisição na Colônia,” *Revista Brasileira de História* 7 (São Paulo, 1987): 151–84.

33. Mott, “Cotidiano,” 196–202.

34. Vainfas, *Trópico*, 240, 344.

35. On the Brazilian Misericórdias, cf. C. R. Boxer, *Portuguese Society in the Tropics: The Municipal Councils of Goa, Macao, Bahia, and Luanda, 1510–1800* (Madison, Wisc., 1965); A.J.R. Russell-Wood, *Fidalgos and Philanthropists: The Santa Casa da Misericórdia of Bahia, 1550–1755* (London, 1968); and Isabel dos Guimarães Sá, *Quando o rico se faz pobre: Misericórdias, caridade e poder no Império Português, 1500–1800* (Lisbon, 1997).

36. Patrícia A. Mulvey, “Black Brothers and Sisters: Membership in Black Lay Brotherhoods of Colonial Brazil,” *Luso-Brazilian Review* 17 (Madison, Wisc., 1980): 253–79; A.J.R. Russell-Wood, “Black and Mulatto Brotherhoods in Colonial Brazil: A Study in Collective Behavior,” *Hispanic American History Review* 54 (Durham, N.C., 1974): 567–602.

37. Célia A. R. Maia Borges, “As irmandades do Rosário: Culturas em negociação,” *Congresso Luso-Brasileiro “Portugal-Brasil: Memórias e Imaginários.” Actas* (Lisbon, 2000), vol. 1, 317–18.

38. Leila Algranti, *Honradas e devotas: Mulheres na Colônia. Condição feminina nos conventos e recolhimentos do sudeste do Brasil, 1750–1822* (Rio de Janeiro, 1993), 67–81.

39. Algranti, *Honradas e devotas*, 322.

40. Caio Boschi, “Ordens Religiosas, clero secular e missão no Brasil,” in F. Bethencourt and K. Chaudhuri, *História da Expansão Portuguesa* (Lisbon, 1998), vol. 3, 304.

41. Mott, “Cotidiano,” 179–83.

42. On the difficulties of conversion, cf. Castelnau-L'Estoile, *Les Ouvriers d'une vigne stérile*, especially 9–20, 497–500.

43. Ronaldo Vainfas, *A heresia dos Índios: Catolicismo e rebeldia no Brasil colonial* (São Paulo, 1995).

44. Mott, "Cotidiano," 196.