

The Jesuits and the misdirections of a mission ^{1 2 3 4}

Os jesuítas e os descaminhos de uma missão

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Abstract

The paper investigates a crisis linked to the action of the Jesuits from the Province of Brazil, in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. This crisis took place among the members of the Society and is exposed, in this manuscript, through criticisms directed to the superiors and in the complaints of deviant behaviors, made by the priests themselves who acted in the mission in Brazil. The Mission misdirections deepen as some members of the Society dishonored their religious vows and practiced violence, especially when dealing with the Indians in the villages. In order to verify these misdirections, we analyzed documentation, little explored and largely unknown for the Brazilian public, researched at the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI), in Rome.

Keywords: jesuit action, religious factors, Colonial Brazil

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³ Funding: Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior – CAPES e Universidade Federal de Alfenas – UNIFAL-MG.

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Resumo

O artigo investiga a ocorrência de uma crise ligada à ação dos jesuítas da Província do Brasil, no final do século XVI e início do XVII. Tal crise se deu entre os membros da Companhia e é exposta, neste manuscrito, nas críticas dirigidas aos superiores e nas denúncias de comportamentos desviantes, feitas pelos próprios padres que atuavam na missão do Brasil. Os descaminhos da missão se aprofundaram na medida em que alguns membros da Companhia feriram os votos religiosos e praticavam violências, sobretudo no trato com os índios nas aldeias. Para verificar esses descaminhos, fez-se uso de uma documentação muito pouco explorada e, em grande parte, inédita para o público brasileiro, pesquisada no Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI), em Roma.

Palavras-chave: ação dos jesuítas, fatores religiosos, Brasil Colônia

“Workers of a barren vine”⁵: hard times

This article uses Jesuit sources⁶ little explored by historiography, researched at the *Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu* (ARSI), in Rome. Such documents show the many “wounds” within the Province of Brazil in the end of the 16th century and beginning of the 18th. The wounded were mainly the Indigenous. But there were also wounds among the members of the Society of Jesus, in the misdirections of a mission that, aiming for spiritual care, took part in the temporal work, managing Indigenous villages, and submitting natives to their orders. Certainly, in the villages that the mission found its greatest challenges, to the point that it was questioned by the direction of the Order in Rome. It was also in the villages that some Ignatians experienced the angst of the mission and, in some cases, asked to be removed from them.

⁵ Expression used by Castelnuovo-L'Etoile (2006).

⁶ Referring to the Jesuit letters, Pécora (2018) affirms that they were seen “as a rhetorical map *in progress* of conversion itself. This means that they were produced as a decisive instrument to the success of the Jesuit missionary action, so that the conventional determinations of epistographic tradition, revised by the Society and applied in the several cases experienced, even the most unexpected ones, sedimented adequate meanings to the plausible pathways of this map [original highlight]” (p. 18). The author highlights that the letters are far from the spontaneous effect of the priests’ new experiences in lands unknown to Europeans. The study of these sources can reveal “the formal and historic construct of the apparent positivity or ease of the testimonies that give birth to Brazil. The labor demanded a lot of ink, a lot of papers. The traces of Brazils can be proportionally found amidst the letters. Finally, we suppose here that the construction of the shape is already part of the history” (p. 68).

The origin of the conflicts and animosities intensified in the end of the 16th century can be found in the alliances established years before. The origin of what I call the crisis within the mission of the Society in Brazilian land can be traced to the alliances between temporal and spiritual power. This alliance was grounded in 1557, when Mem de Sá assumed the government, in which he stayed until 1572. According to Thomas (1982), the efforts of the ruler to Indigenous questions aimed all and each of the following goals:

establish the safety and peace in the land, through the victory and full subjection over the revolted and enemy Indigenous tribes and over their allies, the French;
intensify the efforts to protect the Indigenous allied with the Portuguese, against the spoliation and slavery and, mainly, to speed civilization and Christianization of the Indigenous, through the systematic foundation of villages;
establish a close and friendly contact with the Jesuits, as pioneers of a true Indigenist policy, and support their works with material aid (p. 74)

However, even the center of the Society of Jesus in Rome seemed doubt that the commitments assumed by the priests when accepting the administration of the villages *in the time of Mem de Sá*⁷ were compatible with the *Constitutions* and the particular tasks of the Society. The Superior General of the Jesuits in Rome publically showed his disagreements with the treaty signed by the Jesuits with the secular power of the Brazilian Province. To Thomas (1982), it is possible to trace a relationship between the public opposition in Rome and the provincial determination of Luís da Grã to propose to the governor the appointment of the captains of the villages. In August 1566, the king ordered Mem de Sá to name some Portuguese men worthy of this position. However, despite the disapproval of the direction of the Society, the Jesuits accepted, only a while later, once more, the complete administration of the villages, because, as they argued, the recommendation of Rome was not applicable in the concrete circumstances of the Colony. Against the will of the Society supervisors, the Jesuits of the Province of Brazil were, therefore, over again, strongly under the service of Portuguese Indigenist policy. Until 1572, the priests re-assumed all the administration of the villages. In this year, the new Provincial Inácio de Tolosa, brought from Rome instructions to remove, again, the temporal jurisdiction from the priests, however, with no practical consequences (pp. 89-91).

⁷ According to Perrone-Moisés (1992), in the government of Mem de Sá, the Jesuits were in charge of the village administration, responsible not only for the “spiritual government”, but also for the organization of the villages and the assignment of the Indigenous workers to do different tasks for the village, as well as for workers and for the Crown (“temporal government”) (p. 122).

However, the exercise of temporal activity was always treasured by Ignatians and can be seen, even, in the charisma of the Society. Thus, since its foundation, they made themselves “friends” of the world, and their stage was the mission, contraposing to the religious Orders essentially contemplative from the time. According to Cristina Pompa (2003), Ignatians’ spirituality was an opening to the external world and the mission was its most comprehensive translation. This is implicit in the “Fourth Vow”: complete obedience to the Pope and the missionary’s acceptance to be sent anywhere the Pontiff wanted, amidst the Turkish or to the Indies, among heretics or dissidents. The heretics had to pay for their sins (and the Jesuits were, in Europe and in the New World, among the *consultants of the Inquisition*), and pagans should be removed from the darkness of ignorance through conversion (p. 66).

To O’Malley (2004), the vow of stability was, on one hand, what turned the man into a monk, that is, the commitment to live his whole life in a monastery, where he would seek his own sanctification. The Jesuit fourth vow was, in essence, a vow of mobility, i.e., a solemn promise to travel anywhere in the world to “help the souls”. It was, then, one of the best indications of how the new Order wanted to break away from monastic tradition (p. 461).

The promise of immediate subjection to the Supreme Pontiff allowed, then, an autonomy of the members of the Society in relation to the secular power of Christian kinds. “As they owed their obedience solely to the Pope and their superiors in the hierarchy of the Order, the Jesuits were left out of the jurisdiction of local religious authorities” (Eisenberg, 2000, pp. 36-37).

Furthermore, the early 1580s, the period focused on this work, was mainly marked a decisive turn in the organization of the Society of Jesus, which, at the time, had more than 5,000 members.

In Rome, a new superior general was elected, the Italian Cláudio Aquaviva. His long ruling (1581-1615) would be marked by an intense governmental activity by the center of the Society, which tries to “regularize” and unify the intellectual, spiritual, and administrative practices of the different provinces [original highlight]. (Castelnau-L’Estoile, 2006, p. 20)

According to the author, since the early years of the 1580s, the Jesuit missionary project in Brazil needed to be reformulated. For the author, the first great transformation was the brutal decrease of the Indigenous population in the coast. The contact with the Europeans was deadly to the Indigenous. The microbial shock, first cause of mortality, was worsened by the dismantlement of Indigenous societies provoked by the hunt of Indigenous slaves and the

concentration policy enacted by the Jesuits aiming religious conversion (Castelnau-L'Estoile, 2006, p. 19).

In this context, the Jesuits were no longer in charge only of the spiritual sphere, but also temporal. Ignatians “healed”, “bled”, “buried”, “dug graves” and other similar practices. In this sense, Anchieta (1933) writes in a letter in 1583:

The way the priests of the Society always had with this gentile was to help them in the temporal and the spiritual, in the temporal, they healed their diseases, bled them, and give out of their poverty, due to the extreme need they have of those things, in times of blisters and other diseases, in which they could not help one another, the priests would go with some young men to the houses of the Indians, washing and cleaning them (...). Night and day, the priests walked, giving them the sacrament of confession and anointing with no rest, not even time to pray, burring every day 10 and 12, helping them to dig the graves and bringing them to church to prepare and bury them. (pp. 380-381)

For the center of the Society, the Mission in Brazil seemed to be a “barren vine”, as stated by the Superior General of the Society, Cláudio Aquaviva, in 1582 (Castelnau-L'Estoile, 2006, p. 20). Well, but what could be happening in the Province of Brazil and why did the general call it a “barren vine”? Maybe Aquaviva named Brazil the “barren vine”, mainly, because of the disobedience of some members of the Province towards the orders from Rome – that is, because they did not live “according to our Institute”, as he said –, and especially because many Jesuits were “losing themselves” in the work with the Indians. In this period, the Province of Brazil needed to be visited⁸.

According to Leite (1938-1949), the visitor left Lisbon on March 5 and reached Bahia on May 9, 1583. However, before boarding to the Province of Brazil, the Superior | General Cláudio Aquaviva, gave him a particular *Instruction*, in which he declared the double objective of the *Visit*. Main aim: to “console those of us who work in that vine so barren, laborious, and dangerous”. Private aim: to “see how religious discipline is kept, according to the Institute; and, regarding the Constitutions, rules, and obedience to Rome, make them do them, and put everything in order, regarding the circumstances of the people and places”. The general-priest continued

⁸ This is the *Segunda Visita à Província do Brasil* [Second Visit to the Province of Brazil]. Started in 1583, with Father Cristóvão de Gouveia as a visitor.

the Provincial priests [Anchieta], Gregório Serrão, and Luis da Grã are little regular and not keen on the Constitutions, and that, in general, the subjects act the same way, weak and seldom. Watch this well, you go, and work to understand the root and the remedy that there might be (cited by Leite, 1938-1949, Tomo II, p. 490)

However, the rigidity and orthodoxy from Rome were faced by a reality that went beyond the issues connected to the “religious discipline”, and the “remedy” to the ills of the mission in Brazil did not seem to have the expected effect. In the village, there were much more serious problems, above all, violences and abuses against the Indigenous.

“Fights” among the priests: the mishaps of a Mission

According to Londoño (2002), Inácio de Loyola, as the first Superior General, was clear about the image of the Society through the letters:

Any news should first edify and to reach consolation nothing better than to show the progress of the divine glory in the apostolic works and actions of the priests and Brothers. Writing to be read by many others, the priests should be aware they were producing a text to be interpreted and remembered. (pp. 17-18)

Thus, Castelnau-L’Estoile (2006) highlighted that the correspondence played a key role to disseminate the Jesuit “know-how”, a fundament of its identity. The letters also allowed isolated Jesuits to reaffirm, through the reading and writing of the letters, their belonging to the Society (p. 73).

However, according to Curto (2009), it is possible to separate the recurrent themes and arguments of Jesuit writing at the time. Yet,

inversely, the reading of the same sources allow us to question the idea of an extremely unified Jesuit ideology, as depending on the author we can perceive different types of autonomy regarding the hierarchy of themes and their qualities. (p. 256)

The following letters are far from producing an edifying and unified image of the Society. On the contrary, they were censored, encrypted, and partially erased because they tainted the image idealized by Loyola. Mainly the reports from the villages are a counter-witness to the mission. Even among the Jesuits in the Province of Brazil there were

disagreements and animosities about the mission and the villages. The following letter⁹ is interesting to show some difficulties in this sense. In the beginning of the missive, the Jesuit Antonio Ferreira presented some criticisms towards Anchieta and denounced some colleagues that did not follow the “rules”. We read:

For a long time, I have been expecting the opportunity to tell V. P.¹⁰ some of the things I have been seeing and experiencing in the space of the 11 years I have been living in the residences of Piratininga and S. Vicente, which is all a jurisdiction and the *Capitania*, the last one the Portuguese have in this coast of Brazil at the South part...And though the consciousness has eaten me and had to warn the General priest, by the obligation I have with the Society and the love for the greater good and spiritual avail of this Province of Brazil, I suffered many difficulties contrary to the Provincial priest, who knew well of these difficulties and did not provide a remedy...And this I have understood that the Provincial priest, speaking on the relaxation and distraction of ours, little Spirit, little mortification, little following of the rules, etc. (ARSI, *Lusitania Epistolae*, Lus. 69, fl. 53)

In the same letter, Ferreira refers to the “coast of Brazil” and the consequences of living on it. We read:

Our V. P. will know how this coast of Brazil is weak and relaxed, replete of many vices and not only the people born on it live according to the quality of the land, but also those coming from Portugal and other places, even if they bring some smell of virtue and good raising, little by little, almost without feeling it, they lose themselves and relax on their virtues and create the habits of contrary vices, because the land is very compliant to the depraved nature. (ARSI, Lus. 69, fl. 53)

Certainly, the image of Indians’ inconsistency also derives from the realization that the land is “weak and relaxed”, because, for the Jesuit, the natives lived according to the quality of the land. These stereotypes justified the subjection of the native and classified the Indigenous soul as imperfect. To Hansen (2002), when universalizing the “Neo-Scholastic conception of unity and coherence of the human soul, the 16th-century Jesuits affirmed that the *tupis* in the Brazilian coast were ‘inconsistent’” [original highlight] (p. 28). Viveiros de Castro (1992) affirms that this inconsistency became

⁹ The letter was written by Antonio Ferreira addressed to Aquaviva, “From this house or residence in S. Vicente, coast of Brazil, March 15, 1585” (ARSI, Lus. 69, fl. 53v). The letter is entitled as “some warnings” and there was no copy left in Brazil, as was the case of other letters at the time which had duplicates (ARSI, Lus. 69, fl. 54v). Therefore, this letter was written exclusively to Aquaviva.

¹⁰ In the letters I researched at ARSI, I have opted to keep the abbreviations as they were in the original documents. Furthermore, as all letters were handwritten, so as not to “misrepresent” the document, when I did not understand a word, I placed it between brackets – and, in some cases, when I had problems understanding what was written, I placed an interrogation mark after. However, when an excerpt is unreadable, I use ellipses in the transcription of the documents.

a defining trace of the Amerindian character, consolidating itself as one of the stereotypes of the national imaginary: the ill-converted Indian who, in the first opportunity, sends God, the hoe, and the clothes to hell, happily returning to the jungle, attached to an incurable atavism. Inconsistency is a constant in the savage equation (pp. 186-187)

For the author, in the Brazilian case, the concept of an inconsistent nature of the savage soul comes mainly from the first years of missionary proselytism amidst the *tupis*. “The problem of the Indians, decided the priests, was not in the understanding, actually agile and acute, but in the other two potencies of the soul: the memory and the will, weak, remiss” (p. 188). Thus, the savages created nothing, because they worshiped nothing; and adored nothing, because they obeyed no one. “The *brasis* [referring to Brazilian natives] could not adore and serve a sovereign God, because they had no sovereigns nor served anybody. Their inconsistency resulted, therefore, from the lack of subjection” (pp. 216-217).

However, to Antonio Ferreira, the nature of the land, weak and relaxed, harmed mainly the Ignatians. The Jesuit frequently use the term “remedy” to refer to the means capable of preserving the “virtue” and the “devotion” of Ignatians. We see again the criticism towards Anchieta:

I say this because many of ours who have been coming to Brazil for many years, and for my many years of age and years in the religion, should be, for a good reason, a mirror of all the virtues that ours could see themselves once again when coming to these parts. And it is the contrary, because in a short time they lose the smell of devotion and promptitude for virtue and create habits of laxity and weakness...And the superior treat lightly such type of sickness and not giving them the necessary remedies, but dissimulate things that need correction or remedy and more, when the flaws take force and renew the lack of not giving the remedy forward...This things, I saw with my own eyes and by experience in the work of 11 or 12 years I lived in the Houses of S. Vicente and S. Paulo de Piratininga, in the subjects that Father Joseph Anchieta had formed after many years as a Superior and after taking the role as Provincial, I clearly saw how he favored and defended them (ARSI, Lus. 69, fls. 53-53v)

Finally, Antonio Ferreira presented three things to Aquaviva, which were important to him and deserved the attention of their superiors. To the Jesuit, Anchieta was also flawed here. We can follow his reasoning:

Three things seem to be worthy of warning so that V.P. can pressure and ask very particularly to the Provincials of these parts of Brazil, the following of the rules and religious discipline, not to weaken the Exercise of Praying and not continue with such condescension to the sick, those that Father Joseph Anchieta has many. The words this priest told me not long ago do not seem right. Leaving this *Capitania* and leaving to my command the house of S. Vicente he bid his farewell telling me to not use repression against those who stayed, nor to give them penitence, that to pray the Mass and help in the refectory would be enough. (ARSI, Lus. 69, fl. 53v)

This letter represents well the conflict of positions established in this period: between Roman “orthodoxy” and the practices of individuals. In this case, the conflict referred to the way of living the Jesuit mission: between Anchieta (who seemed closer to the “loving path”¹¹ and understandable on dealing with the priests) and Antonio Ferreira (who represented the “orthodox path”, i.e., those who agreed with Aquaviva’s wish to reorganize the disperse body, mainly through the observation of regulating principles of the Society).

Still on the conflicts within the Society, we can read the letter written by Marçal Belliarte to Aquaviva on January 1st, 1591 (ARSI, Lus. 71, fl. 003v). On it we can see some goods belonging to the Jesuits and the disagreement of the Provincial about this. It also highlights evidence of “favoring” some members of the Society by the visitor Gouveia:

In the Province ours have some extremely curious things that seem against the religious poverty of our Society, such as reliquaries and silver plates and other expensive objects. I wanted to solve them, but I could not because it would be necessary to start by some notably favored by Father Cristóvão de Gouveia, with whose approval they have done it... (ARSI, Lus. 71, fl. 003v)

Still in the same letter, Belliarte does not measure his words to express his dissatisfaction with Fernão Cardim. We read:

...Father Cardim... in the government that helps me very little, not to say hinders it. Because if I order something that does not please him or is not of his liking...with such words he acts that all understand that he does not agree, as V.P. knows. If the thing touches something particular and leads to rigor, comments: the Provincial priest orders it, I wish I did not have to do this...I am taken as harsh, and he as docile and benign and this way, I [hecho] hateful. (ARSI, Lus. 71, fl. 003v)

Now Aquaviva was worried with the “good smell” of the Society and thus wrote to Father Marçal in October 1591, showing his concern that the Ignatians were living in the Indigenous villages:

¹¹ In this sense, according to Pécora (1999), in the letters of Father Manuel da Nóbrega (1517-70), the first movement proposed “outlines a method of conversion mainly grounded in a *loving path*” (p. 395 – author’s highlight). However, especially since the so-called “Indian wars”, Nóbrega’s position distances itself from the *loving path of conversion*, whose efficiency was put in doubt the longer the *experience* in the Colony. Thus, according to Pécora (1999), the loving path seemed to Nóbrega a less efficient way to deal with the Indigenous – “servile people” – than that enacted “by fear”: “thus it is by *experience* that we see that through love their conversion is very difficult, but, as it is a servile people, they do everything by fear” [original highlight] (p. 400).

We have allowed that the one of ours who live in the villages...Now we receive letter that they us they use this leave unwell and for their survival they have as a specie...meats, that our parts send and mainly to Angola, from whose account come the slaves. V. R. this can harm our good name and the smell of the Society and give occasion for those who do not see our things with good eyes to have grounds to repress them. It is advisable that the consultors have complete notice of the orders sent from Rome on the good governance of the Province. (ARSI, *Brasilia Epistolae* – Bras. 2, fl. 64)

The following transcribed letter is from Cristóvão de Gouveia. It was written in Lisbon on August 15, 1593 (ARSI, Lus. 72, fl. 121). Even after finishing the Visit, Gouveia was still consulted by Rome for issues referring to the Province of Brazil. The excerpt transcribed refers to a priest that was causing problems here.

I received from V. P. on June 5 about Father. Antonio Dias from Brazil. What I remember from this priest is that it was noted that...not join his superiors nor their orders. And to be weak...in his spiritual dealings, of ours with him, as well as the Indians in the village. His way of governing was more [in virga?] adamant and with vigor and punishment that with a soft paternal direction and charity, that many Indians escaped his village to others, afraid of him... (ARSI, Lus. 72, fl. 121)

About the same priest, we can highlight the recommendation of not staying in the villages without a colleague. Another important issue that appeared was Gouveia's reference to the regiment he established at the end of his Visit. This data is interesting, mainly because it shows how much Gouveia trusted that the rules he left would be followed. We can see this in the excerpt:

For those things and ways of action that this Priest., I had him for some time out of the Village...Seeing also that this Priest was old, ancient, a speaker of Tupi, and was unworthy of other occupations in the *Colégios*, there was no substantial flaw, before confident and well accepted by the Portuguese, it seemed to me to let him return to his village, though, giving him many warnings, in particular and in writing, showing him all the knowledge and will: strongly recommending his superiors to place him with another priest in charge of the sacraments and teach the Indians. And this way, the Priest could dedicate more time to the chapel and to the business of importance to which he has talent, spirit and expedition. About what the V.P. points out in particular, of him flogging the female Indians in front of him and kicking them etc. I have never seen him doing that there, if not ordering to punish harshly...the boys in the school through the hands of ours. And these two things, I have forbidden those in the Visits of R.º in the villages. n.º 11.12. (ARSI, Lus. 72, fl. 121)

Acts that harm the “good smell” of the Society: priests’ grave sins

In the letters reproduced below, I highlight the censorship established by some Jesuits, seen as a cause of scandal against the “good smell” of the Society. These letters, which were censored or that exposed something that “tainted” the image of the Society, are interesting especially when we think about the issue pointed out by Ginzburg (2002), to which “we need to learn to read the testimonies in reverse, against the intentions of those who produced them”¹² (p. 43).

The testimonies in the letters used here were certainly read in reverse. However, these documents were also marked by the rhetoric conditions of the time, in which the Ignatians were formed. Even so, the missives in question portrayed the wounds and animosities. The documents classify and silence the natives and show the practices of violence and abuse against those who could not speak and were forced to serve the “masters of speech”, as the natives called the priest of the Society since their arrival. In a broader analysis, therefore, we need to consider other issues that imposed the misdirections of the mission and that implied the subjection of the Indigenous. To do so, we should cite the considerations of Hansen (2005), when quoting Michel de Certeau, in the text “*Etno-grafia. A oralidade ou o espaço do outro: Léry*, in which the author analyzes *Voyage au Brésil*, by Jean de Léry. According to Hansen (2005), in this text, Certeau highlights

savage *spatiality*, or the synchronic framework of the Indigenous social systems postulated as societies with no history, opposed to the Portuguese temporality, defined and guided providentially as part of a universal drama of salvation; *alterity*, or the wild difference, which highlights the cultural shock between Europe and America, opposed to the Catholic identity that subordinates the difference as one more similarity, distant and confused, among others, and, because of that, controlled by the encounter of its principle; the *inconsistence* or statute given to the Indigenous collective phenomena, such as shamanism, polygamy, ritual war, and anthropophagy, which start to be referred to a meaning strange to them, the unity or the coherence of the Christian soul, applied to them as a knowledge-power from the outside. This is what happens exemplary with the theme of savage inconsistency, opposed by the priest to *consciousness*, that is presented in the poetry and in the theater as a Platonic-Augustinian-Scholastic memory, simultaneously forgetfulness and remembrance of guilt resulting from the original sin. Mainly in the Jesuit correspondence with Europe, such operations establish a hermeneutics or a technique of written comment characterized by the great analytical dispersion of observation, collection, and systematization of empirical data [original highlight]. (p. 43 – note)

¹² In order to discuss the relation of the historian with the sources, Ginzburg relies on Benjamin (1987), to whom “There has never been a document of culture, which is not simultaneously one of barbarism. And just as it is itself not free from barbarism, neither is it free from the process of transmission, in which it falls from one set of hands into another. The historical materialist thus moves as far away from this as measurably possible. He regards it as his task to brush history against the grain.” (p. 225).

Though characterized by a “great analytical dispersion of observation”, some instigating questions are shown by such “in reverse testimonies” and certainly allow to “to brush history against the grain”. Thus, we see that, on September 9, 1594 (ARSI, Bras. 3-II, fl. 361), the provincial Pero Rodrigues answered to Aquaviva some questions from Rome. Among them, the following question asked by the General and Rodrigues’s answer:

6.º If it is true that the Provincial demanded to flog the “*cabos de Raya*” [a punishment device] a brother that was called [...] ¹³ already dismissed this punishment is not used by the Society and the peculiarities in his farewell...

R. El [...] ¹⁴ was from rare parts and great expectations for the ministries of the Society, there would be some indiscretions and weaknesses with the person himself *in materia castitatis*, and was in this issue so troubled that vehemently asked the Priest to leave the vows... The Father flogged him twice and the 2nd was with *cabos de Raya* as affirmed Father Fernão Cardim who was then the Rector and Father Manuel Hernandes the Minister... who executed ... And was famous with an Indian who said was pregnant by him and other misbehaviors of bad examples; while he was still with the vows and the clothes of the Society, what the priests informed to the Provincial. (ARSI, Bras. 3-II, fls. 360v-361)

Despite the punishment applied among the members of the Society itself, there were some Jesuits who caused problems to their superiors. In the following letter transcribed, from September 18, 1601 (ARSI, Bras. 8-1, fl. 28v), Pero Rodrigues talked about two Ignatians who were fired and the reasons for that, because they seemed to mock the rigid norms established by the Society. One of them, taking advantage of the absence of the rector, “made a dance” that bothered the superiors. We read:

Two Brothers were dismissed in Pernambuco after many consultations and remedies that they did not take. Father Barboza, in these few years among us, was very distracted, lazy, disobedient, fearful... In the *Colégio de Pernambuco* he did not want to study nor take the penitence that the priest Rector ordered him, thus with this flaws he was kept in a cubicle, broke the window with kicks... Lázaro G. at the *Colégio do Rio* caused much trouble to Father Fernão Cardim... with disobedience and public deedifications, as he was in many other things, once when the saints left... he made a dance... when the priest Rector was out of the house, he did not want to take communion from the hands of priest Minister... evil and stubborn... (ARSI, Bras. 8-1, fl. 28v) ¹⁵

¹³ The name of the subject is crossed on the manuscript and above it there is the letter “N”.

¹⁴ Also crossed out and following the same procedure as in the previous note.

¹⁵ It is interesting to note that the “duplicate” of this letter, which stayed in Brazil. In it, the topics of the letter are listed. The last topic is: “7. Farewell of two Brothers and its causes” (ARSI, Bras. 8-1, fl. 29v).

In the following letter, there is the issue of “coded”¹⁶ priests. The letter, which seem to be from the Provincial, Pero Rodrigues, was written in Bahia, on September 15, 1602 (ARSI, Bras. 8-1, fl. 17). We can see, once again, the criticism on Father Fernão Cardim for not being “very familiar with the ways to proceed”:

In the list of those promoted to the profession in three vows, the 1st was Father. “J.□.□.17 [CODED!!!], that I as well as other Consulting priests were surprised and understand that it was the information of Father Fernão Cardim, who probably was not aware of the ways to proceed in this Province. I did not propose him to V. P. and asked about this by another priest, I answered that I did not proposed it, to not bring him any harm, but now I will tell V.P. what is happening. This is an old priest in the Province and has worked a lot with the Indians, bringing them from the inlands, and in the villages, but not with the satisfaction demanded by the good smell of the Society. I was informed of his serious flaws...2nd very choleric against all priests, no respect not even with his superior; 3rd He is not loyal when saying the notable flaws of others to the superiors...4th He is notably impertinent and little confident when dealing with women, Indians and Portuguese ones... (ARSI, Bras. 8-1, fl. 17)

However, among the letter I have found at ARSI, none is as a “counterwitness” as the following one. Written by Father Balthasar de Miranda, in February 20, 1602 (ARSI, Bras. 8-1, fl. 26v), it displayed the many “wounds” in the Province of Brazil. The first of them was the failure to comply the determinations left by Gouveia during his *Visit*:

Pax Christi.

Considering that last year I wrote V.P. and I still do not know if my letter was delivery, in which I proposed to V.P. some things that seemed to me needed to promote a remedy in this *Colégio*.... Thirteen *léguas*¹⁸ from this *Colégio*, we have a village in which the superior is Father Pero Leitão, to whom I was a colleague... I have noticed that they strongly do not follow two things from the Visit of Father Christóvão de Gouveia: that in the early morning the Mass is said to the people and in the end of it that the prayers are taught as part of a dialogue (ARSI, Bras. 8-1, fl. 24)

The letter continue to expose delicate problems regarding the violent and abusive behavior of Father Pero Leitão:

¹⁶ The term “coded” [*cifrado*] appeared in the Jesuit manuscripts as a way to hid the name of some Ignatian in sinful or shameful conditions to the “good smell” of the Society. In the letters I consulted and analyzed in Rome, such a strategy was constantly used. Instead of the name of the subject, they wrote disconnected characters that could not be understood by an unauthorized reader.

¹⁷ Over these characters it is written in another handwriting “Afonso Gago”. To me, it seemed like a note done in Rome, after the letter had reached the correct hands. About Father Afonso Pero Rodrigues said in 1601: “he has two flaws that ‘ungoldens’ everything: 1st Little sober; 2nd Unchaste when dealing with women, Indians and Portuguese, On this subjects he has given a lot of work to his superiors... [original highlight]” (ARSI, Bras. 8-1, fl. 30).

¹⁸ Translation note: *Légua* was a unit of measure equivalent to approximately 4.2 kilometers.

Another point of the Visit is that the priest does not punish anyone by his hand. And about this it is shameful to see: because Father Pero Leitão routinely beats men and boys, women and girls...and slaps them and, sometimes, kicks. I saw with my own eyes one night that when bringing to him...a tray of baked cheese...., because he did not like it, kicked the stomach of a young man with such an energy that reached more than six steps, falling the boy to ground and also wanting to flog him. I saw another time that bringing him something the Indians hunted ... the priest ordered it to be cooked, thinking that a part of fabric was missing and the Indian affirming he did not see or take it, the priest slapped, kicked, and punched him...I also saw that an Indian was passing by our door, the priest called him, and because the Indian did come soon enough, he threw a stick on him that almost hit his head, some Portuguese men who were in the village helped him...[original highlight] (ARSI, Bras. 8-1, fl. 24)

Father Pero Leitão continued with his atrocities, having the Indigenous as his victims.

We read:

I once saw the priest entering the kitchen and finding the *coalheira* badly fixed, took it into his and hit the back of the young man with it, three or four times, dishonoring him with ugly words...I saw more than one young man...he pick his head between his legs and slapped him many times...until there was blood...The Indians are so captive that they not even have the freedom to leave and find something to eat, and when some ask to for permission to go to the sea and seek something for their women to eat...he makes them bring large mussels, making those poor people bring him food. And if they do not bring them full, they are, at least, reprehended (ARSI, Bras. 8-1, fl. 24v)¹⁹

The behavior of Father Leitão caused scandal amidst some of his Jesuit colleagues. We must remember that, since the beginning of the mission in Brazilian lands, the natives were classified as ridiculous beings, due to their “diabolic habits” and so on. In this direction, Baeta Neves (1978) points out that the gentile was completely unrelated to any cultural element present even in the nightmares familiar to the Europeans. The gentile could not be compared, neither for their “external appearance”, much less to the “feats” of their soul, to the already-known patterns of European Christianity. “Not recognizing cultural nor corporal characters, but supposing that they were men and similar, the ideology of catechism looks for a point to be closer to the gentile” (p. 50).

For Raminelli (1996), the religious men proved the catechumens’ inclination for Christianization. To do so, they gave the Indigenous and the Europeans the same origin. The Americans, the priests, and the colonists had the same disposition to receive the divine teachings. The seed of the “true religion” already lived in the hearts of the natives in the land. Therefore, the priests would simply need to intervene to flourish the seed planted by God.

¹⁹ The letter continues describing the atrocities practiced by the priest, however most cannot be read and I could not completely transcribe it.

Thus, for Ignatians, the image of the barbarian had a new meaning; it did not support slavery, but valued catechism and highlighted the heroic mission of those sent by the Church. With divine interference, the “human beasts” would transform themselves into devout Christians (pp. 16-17).

Therefore, besides classifying, stereotypes determined the actions of the Europeans regarding the Amerindians, because, according to Raminelli (1996), colonization was grounded on the assumption that the natives were beings immersed in darkness, who needed European intervention to reach the stage of human “evolution” reached by Christians (p. 165).

However, to Father Leitão, the intervention was done by force, violence, and the abuse of Indigenous not even the secrecy of the sacrament of penance escape the abuses of the priest:

The priest easily tells any white person the sins and ills of the Indians...that one spent the night with such woman...That woman spent a long time with that man...Such Portuguese, who came here in a time, sinned with another woman...and directly tells some Indians about the adultery of their women... (ARSI, Bras. 8-1, fl. 25v)

In the following excerpt, the issue pointed out by Father Balthasar de Miranda exposed some “scandalous” events, there was even a highlight in the manuscript about the “sin” of Father Leitão. The Indigenous escape because they were raped and abused by the sinner priest:

the Indians, the young men at school...came to tell me that Father Pero Leitão carnally delights himself with young men; what I considered this strange because the priest in the exercises is chaste: but wishing to know the truth of this cause, which would go against the integrity of my religion...a young man told me...that the priest ordered him to scratch and rub “in genitalibus”, and the priest doing the same with the young man...this was told to me by the same accomplice with many tears, crying about the event. From another young man I heard that the priest ordered him to rub his genitals. Two young man ran away from the house, which...Indians...escaped from Father Leitão because he sinned with them...[original highlight]. (ARSI, Bras. 8-1, fl. 25)

The vices of Father Leitão were also not compatible with an Ignatian. The discipline imposed by Ignatian rules was not followed by him and, Father Balthasar also denounced him for this “flaws”:

... Father. Leitão... during the exams is always occupied with exterior things. The canonical hours he commonly prays...lying in bed, with many interpellations of sleep, snoring soundly...At Mass, when long, he takes a quarter of an hour, normally less than more, normally he says it only on Sundays and Holy days and sometimes when he is forced to do say the weekday Mass, he does...with no type of retreat beforehand, nor after. Sacrifice nor discipline, he was not born to it...he always eats much and what he wants because he is always loaded with many chickens, eggs, and wine, and no sort of spiritual exercise... (ARSI, Bras. 8-1, fl. 26)

In the following excerpt, according to Father Balthasar, Father Pero Leitão was angry on the ways the Society was organized and made fun of its orthodoxy and rigidity of the organization of the Order:

During the time I followed him, I considered him to always be terribly critical to the ruling ways of our superiors, condemning the Society, and mocking its various ways of voting and professing, troubled by the captivity of the religion, saying it removes our freedom more than it allows the natural right; and other tales in the same direction... (ARSI, Bras. 8-1, fl. 26)

Appalled and as if justifying his mistakes, Pero Leitão denounced his colleagues-priests, saying that a great number of them were New Christians and that others “sinned with the Indians under the altar”:

He told me that the priests Luis da Grã, Ignácio Tolosa, Afonso..., Domingos..., José da Costa, Quirício Caxa... are New Christians; and those who come from Portugal to this Province are the scoria of the Society, and that Father Luis da Grã when came to the Province, came on exile, but as he was who he was, they sent him with the title of Provincial...He told me that Father Diogo Ximenes... as he was the secretary of the V. P. was baptized standing. He told me that an Indian from the village said that Father Luiz Valente and Father Diogo Nunes had sinned with all women Indians under the altar...He told me about other of the house who were found with the women Indians and other who drank the wine...but the Indians I found who he said were the authors of some of these sayings denied... (ARSI, Bras. 8-1, fl. 26)

Father Balthasar complained, however, that he was not heard on his denunciations against Father Pero Leitão:

From all I have been saying to the V.P. I warned the priest Rector very slowly, in the village and in here, in the *Colégio* I am, and considering that the priest did not take any measures, I warned...I asked the Priest to clear the situation...before it spread... (ARSI, Bras. 8-1, fl. 26)

Father Balthasar ended the letter swearing that all he described was true and denouncing the games of interest that trespassed the relations among the Ignatians in the Province of Brazil:

The priest Rector waits for long hours his successor and is interested in the many gifts of Father Leitão; the Provincial priest is, it seems to him there will not be any remedy, because...it is so terrible that this man, who know how to cultivate the superiors of this Province and does with them whatever he wants; and among the neighbors he know has in the village there is a saying that when he suspects they want to him to move or remove him from the village, he sends pigs, eggs, and other things to the Rector...And how he has been charming the superiors...there will not be many witnesses, by the simulation he lives...I have proposed to V.P. all I have been saying with as truth as if I had lived on His feet...I ask the holy blessing of the V.P. of this *capitania* in Brazil, February 20, 1602. From V. P. unworthy son, Balthasar de Miranda. (ARSI, Bras. 8-1, fl. 26v)²⁰

Father Pero Leitão troubled his companions a lot, as others besides Father Balthasar denounced him. The letter transcribed below is from Father Antonio de Araújo to Aquaviva. Certainly, aiming to veil the meaning of some terms, the letter is full of abbreviations and, because of that, I had a lot of difficulty and worked for a long time to transcribe it. However, the same letter reveals a very clear meaning: to denounce other “scandals” committed by the “sinner” priest. We read:

Mui Rev. em Xto Pe.

Pax Christi.

At the end of my 3rd year of probation, which was on November 99, having been sent to a village, I followed the unfortunate path of certain serious and reliable people, who passed by the house: because it was very important to deal with these things with me. I went with my companion. What the matron of said house told me in privacy is what follows in the same words.

The Society owes nothing to “Priest. P^o L.” because of everything she has to say etc. and all know about the generation. Asking about Priest N. said, ...is in the Colégio closed, or [walled] in a cubicle, giving him to eat little, and thus ending the poor man. Asking about the thing, saying that when [imposing ?] something with some Indian woman, he replied: Now, it is not like this...he said, by other things that God helps us: implying that by sin “M”. (ARSI, Bras. 3-I, fl. 187)

The so-called “matron” continued to expose what, according to her, were comments by Father Pero Leitão. The letter had many cross outs, but what I could understand and transcribe follows the profile of the previously-mentioned Father Leitão. Many priests and people “considered good” were under the attack of the priests’ sharp tongue. We read:

²⁰ In the duplicate left in Brazil, there were no similar details to what was described in the letter sent to Rome. It only cited the topic of the letter (it has three lines). In this second copy, however, there is the information it has left Pernambuco and that the letter was addressed to Aquaviva (ARSI, Bras. 8-1, fl. 27). Thus, it seemed to be a censored letter.

He is a drunk, he is there with the whore daughter of...that is a black man...that is near the village of Espírito Santo as a pen, where they are were the priest and a companion...Said matron telling other particularities that she said she talked with the Provincial priest about the same priest...The priest...that would be with them, and had just come from Portugal...;said, he is a New Christian...About the other priest, that he was a taleteller...that asking about a woman from a certain *Capitania*, that said matron believed to be good, said: this great whore! To which she was not scandalized... (ARSI, Bras. 3-I, fl. 187)

Father Araújo told everything to his superiors, but the provincial superior seemed resigned with the situation and did not see a way to deal with the “sinner” priest:

After being in the *Colégio*, forced by my confessor, I informed those things to my superiors in a Thursday, last December 16. The Provincial Priest told me that considering the tongue of said priest he did not doubt he said such things. But what could he do, if he could not dismiss him, nor send him to Portugal, because he had no order from the V.P. to do so. Finally, I considered he did not take much notice of those things, it seems he has the habit of hearing many such as these, whom he removed the last year 99 to Pernambuco, where he placed him in a village, proving as a company a nephew of his: many of this *Colégio* were surprised, because it is well-known the way the priest is in the villages: as the V.P. has in writing. (ARSI, Bras. 3-I, fl. 187)

In the same letter, dealing about another subject that exposed more internal conflicts in the Province, Father Araújo felt betrayed by his superiors that, according to him, sent him definitively to the village of Boipeba without his knowledge. The priest desperately asks to be removed from there. In my opinion, this reflected how many Jesuits thought, who feared for their own vocations, when seeing themselves among the Indigenous. We follow:

Last December 29, I was warned by the superior provincial priest and rector, in rest, in front of all, to go to the village of Boipeba 19 *léguas* from this bay... Nothing was said and no superior told me about staying there, thus his intention was this...I stay in this village of Boipeba waiting for V.R. to read this, without delay to remove me from here, because I affirm to V. R. that [relief?] thus my salvation and restlessness of my own consciousness, that is what I came here to seek in religion...And because I understand that V.R. will act as it should in this case, which is to remove me from here soon. (ARSI, Bras. 3-I, fl. 187v)

Despite being against his will in the village, the Jesuit continues to denounce some “scandals” he witnessed in Boipeba. We read:

I will not fail to say what I have seen in this village of Boipeba: this is also known by the superiors that have for years dissimulated it. The Brother who has been taking care of the temporal comes and goes out of the house to the woods... One of the priests goes with no colleague to the house of the Portuguese, where he necessarily has to sleep. In our house there is no type of closure or fence: our Houses are together with the Indians, men and women, imposing to ours some things regarding chastity, as it is known and notorious on the mouths of the Portuguese. I thought the Priest that was in charge to provide this *Colégio* of the temporal treated the freed Indians badly... From Bahia, February 29, 1600. Ant^o de Araújo. (ARSI, Bras. 3-I, fl. 188)²¹

Thus, the “barren vine” discouraged many Jesuits who came to Brazil in this period. Some of them asked to return to Portugal. It was the case of Father Gonçalo Leite, the first art teacher in the *Colégio da Bahia*. On June 20, 1586, already in Lisbon, after living in Brazil from 1572 until that year, wrote to the general, highlighting the dire state of the land. The title of the letter is “Some warnings about Brazil” (ARSI, Lus. 69, fl. 244v). We read:

All the Priests in Brazil have been disturbed and unsettled in their consciousness with the many cases on the captives, homicides, and many aggravations that the white people do against the Indians of this land... Otherwise, one can persuade those who go to Brazil that they are not going to save souls, but to condemn theirs. God knows the pain in my heart while I write to you, because I saw our priest take confession of killers and robbers of freedom, farm and the sweat of others, no restitution of the past, no remedy to future ills, they commit the same type daily... (ARSI, Lus. 69, fl. 243v)

In the same letter, Father Gonçalo Leite questioned how the new missionaries were sent to Brazil: “When they send some priest to Brazil it is always sudden and so people on the outside believe that they came here dismissed and raise doubts on their lives...” (ARSI, Lus. 69, fl. 243v).

The Jesuit finishes the letter by making himself available to Aquaviva to “remove the fear” of those coming to Brazil:

Nowadays I have nothing else but to stay in this house of São Roque, prepared to do what V. P. and the other superiors order me to do, and if necessary to remove the fear in those of ours who have to go to Brazil... (ARSI, Lus. 69, fl. 244)

²¹ Once more, the copy of the letter that stayed in Brazil did not describe anything “scandalous” (ARSI, Bras. 3-I, fl. 188v).

Final remarks

Behind the “codes” used by Ignatians in their letters, aiming to preserve the identity of some members of the Society, I understand that there was the wish to preserve the “good smell” of the Society of Jesus. In fact, supported by the set of sources from this period, we cannot bury in a mass grave all the work of the men in black and doubt the good faith of a great part of those sent to the mission. However, even with the “codes”, we cannot hide what I have called the misdirections of a mission.

As we could see, such misdirections got more serious during the period of internal criticisms, mainly focused on the denouncement of the behavior deviations in the work of Ignatians in the villages in the Province of Brazil written by the missionaries themselves. The text also showed that the confinement of natives and their subjection to the missionaries, brought a time of violences and scandals in the villages. Beyond this, it was also possible to perceive a moment of disagreements and animosities among the positions of some members of the Society who were on a mission in Brazil and the direction of the Order, in Rome. Such disagreements show the clash between the “loving way” position and the one I called orthodox.

Finally, we must highlight that the Indigenous were the main victims of the violences and abuses presented here. The posture of some Ignatians was far from producing the “good smell” they desired. Certainly, after the contact with the documents analyzed in these articles, we must state that the attitudes of some religious men had the smell of rot, of violence, of abuse, and the massacre of those who could not react to such monstrosity.

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Submission data:

Submitted for evaluation October 9, 2020; revised February 20, 2021; accepted for publication on July 5, 2021

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