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### A Messianic-Millenarian Movement in Brazil: Canudos/Ba 1893–1897

Celiane da Rocha Vieira

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, [vieirac@csl.edu](mailto:vieirac@csl.edu)

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**A MESSIANIC-MILLENARIAN MOVEMENT IN BRAZIL: CANUDOS/BA  
1893–1897**

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**A Thesis  
Presented to the Faculty of  
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Theological History  
in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts**

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**By  
Celiane da Rocha Witt Vieira  
October, 2018**

**Approved by** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Dr. Paul Robinson** **Advisor**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Dr. Timothy Dost** **Reader**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Dr. Leopoldo A. Sánchez M.** **Reader**

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**To Alexandre, the love of my life.**



**I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.**

**John 11.25–26 ESV**

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Finally, I am grateful to God the Father, who created me; to God the Son, who gave himself for me; to God the Holy Spirit, who preserves my faith. To the triune God all the glory and praise.

## CHRONOLOGY

<b>Antônio Vicente Mendes Maciel is born at Quixeramobim/Ceará</b>	<b>1828</b>
<b>Antônio Maciel wedding</b>	<b>1857</b>
<b>Antônio Maciel starts as a wanderer</b>	<b>1865</b>
<b>Antônio Maciel is arrested and taken to Ceará</b>	<b>1876</b>
<b>Bom Jesus Village</b>	<b>1881–1893</b>
<b>Letter from Archbishop of Bahia declaring Antônio Maciel (Conselheiro) persona non grata</b>	<b>1882</b>
<b>End of slavery</b>	<b>1888</b>
<b>Proclamation of the Republic</b>	<b>1889</b>
<b>Protest against taxes at Soure</b>	<b>1893</b>
<b>Belo Monte/Canudos Village</b>	<b>1893</b>
<b>Capuchins' visit</b>	<b>1895</b>
<b>First conflict – Uauá (Lieutenant Pires Ferreira, 100 soldiers)</b>	<b>November 1896</b>
<b>Fourth and last conflict (General Artur Oscar, 10,000 soldiers)</b>	<b>July–October 1897</b>
<b>Antônio Conselheiro dies</b>	<b>September 1897</b>
<b><i>O Rei dos Jagunços</i>, Manuel Benicio</b>	<b>1899</b>
<b><i>Os Sertões</i>, Euclides da Cunha</b>	<b>1902</b>

## ABSTRACT

Vieira, Celiane da Rocha Witt, "A Messianic-Millenarian Movement in Brazil: Canudos/BA: 1893–1897" Master of Arts Thesis. Concordia Seminary, "Master of Arts Thesis. Concordia Seminary, 2018. 78 pp.

The Brazilian backland is a place where religion plays a huge part in the lives of the population. At the end of the 19th century an important episode takes place amidst the turmoil the nation was facing, the small community of Canudos/Bahia became part of the news nationally and internationally as a rebel and religious fanatic settlement under the authority of one man, Antônio Conselheiro. Taking into account the fact that the terms millennial and messianic themselves label a variety of movements that arose organically within the history of the church, this study analyzes the origin of these terms and their development through time, identifying Canudos as a messianic-millenarian movement. Most scholars who have studied the movement of Canudos over the years have viewed the religious elements as little more than ancillary to what they see as the more fundamental concerns of economics and politics. This is especially true when they discuss the tragic events of the community's commotion and its suppression by the government. In this connection, the analysis of Conselheiro's notebook and oral testimonies about the community and its leader allowed this study to better comprehend the complexity of Canudos. The purpose of the present thesis is an analysis of the theology of this movement using the lens of research on messianism and millennialism, placing the religious life and belief of the community at the center of its existence, and as the foundation of everything its members thought and did. Centering religious belief and life in this way offers a better explanation of the community's reaction to contemporary events and to the government than economic or political considerations alone.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Brazilian messianic-millenarian movement known as Canudos began to take form in the 1890s, even though its leader had begun his life as a wanderer many years before. Antônio Vicente Mendes Maciel, later identified as Antônio Conselheiro, gained prestige around the states located in the Northeastern region of Brazil by building churches and cemeteries and preaching.

The declaration of the Republic in 1889 brought changes to the government, one of which was the autonomy of the municipalities. Because of that, in 1893, taxes were increased. Antônio Conselheiro, who considered the Republic to be the devil's government, reacted by intensifying his preaching against the government; he urged people to stop living in accordance with this new law. The news about his preaching worried the authorities, and the police were sent to intervene; the mission was not successful. After the authorities' first attempt to suppress the group in the inhabited town of Masseté failed, Antônio Conselheiro and his followers walked for days until they stopped at Canudos and settled there. The next two battles resulted in two more failures for the government's army. People continued to come in order to support the community (in its heyday there were around twenty thousand people living in Canudos), for they interpreted the community's success in battle as an indication that they were fighting a "holy war" against the devil, in this case, the Republic. The Brazilian authorities feared that the army and the Republic would fall in disgrace; they could not let unarmed men win the respect of the country by defeating the army. Motivated by that fear, the politicians ordered the commanders of the army

to end the war once and for all. In July 1897, the last expedition was sent and, after many losses, was able to annihilate Antônio Conselheiro and his followers by October of that year.

While Canudos was commonly identified as a place of rebels, and even heretics, the community created around Antônio Conselheiro identified itself as “excellent Catholics.” Euclides da Cunha writes that every day at sunset, even during battles, the bells rang to call the community to meet inside and around the church, and they stayed there kneeling and praying for hours. After the prayer, the people had to kiss the crucifix first, followed by the images of the Virgin Mary and Jesus, and then those of all the saints.

Identifying Canudos as a messianic and millenarian movement, this study will interact with scholars who work on millenarianism and messianism. Millenarianism is a topic being debated among sociologists, anthropologists, and most of all, historians. A literature review of this subject reveals that theologians, with a few exceptions, are not engaged in such studies.

Scholars who study millenarianism agree that the term millennium (and its variations) is no longer used with the same meaning it had when used in the book of Revelation. The theological meaning of the Millennium refers to a period of a thousand years—be it literal or symbolic—in which the Messiah reigns among God’s people. Over time, however, the diverse expressions of Christian beliefs about this millennium, and the similarity of these expressions to those of non-Christians, have required historians of religion, sociologists, and anthropologists to expand and modify their understanding of what “the Millennium” might mean. As a result, millenarianism has become a label to describe a type of salvation, according to Norman Cohn, and can refer to ideas concerning a collective salvation that will take place in a perfect age or in the kingdom of God, according to Catherine Wessinger.

In the late 1990s, Wessinger moved further away from eschatological nomenclatures that,



according to her, were no longer communicating clearly what millennialists believed and, consequently, were misleading readers. She formulated a new terminology intended to distinguish between the general expectations of two different groups, one more pessimistic and the other more optimistic, and to dissociate both of them from theology in the strict sense. She identified Premillennialism as Catastrophic Millennialism and Postmillennialism as Progressive Millennialism.<sup>1</sup>

The scholar Anthony F. C. Wallace took a different approach, distinguishing between “millenarian” movements and “messianic” movements. According to him, millenarian movements emphasize a changed apocalyptic world whose transformation is engineered by the supernatural, while messianic movements emphasize the presence of a human savior within this transformation. Despite their distinction, the two movements often appear together and are treated as two categories that are not mutually exclusive.

Maria Isaura P. de Queiroz seems to agree with Wallace’s distinction. In her book *O Messianismo no Brasil e no Mundo*, she states that while British and French scholarship often use millenarianism and messianism as synonyms, she understands that the two terms have different connotations. Queiroz categorizes messianism as a sub-division of millenarianism, for the subject of the millennium is much broader and not reduced to just this one feature. She observes that the terrestrial paradise will not necessarily be introduced by only one person, but it could be a group of people, or even the result of magical practices.

The distinctions put forth by scholars led Catherine Wessinger to explain, in her analysis of Annie Besant in 1988, that messianism is “characteristic of most but not all pre-millenarian

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Wessinger, “Millennialism with and without the Mayhem,” in *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements*, ed. Thomas Robbins and Susan J. Palmer (New York: Routledge, 1997), 51.

movements.”<sup>2</sup> Whenever a messiah is identified in a movement, the movement is categorized as messianic-millenarian. Like many similar groups throughout history, the people united in Canudos intended to live their lives away from the corrupted world, in their case, the Republic, which was the sign of the Antichrist’s triumph.

### **The Methodological Procedure**

The methods to be used in this paper are descriptive, analytic, and interpretative. I will interact with national and international newspapers that covered the Canudos events in 1897, as well as books written slightly later by journalists who were sent to Canudos as correspondents by major Brazilian newspaper agencies to inform the country about the conflict, specifically, Euclides da Cunha and Manuel Benício. I will also refer to letters addressed to the Baron of Jeremoabo, the most powerful landlord in the region during the time of the events of Canudos, collected and published by Consuelo Sampaio; the speeches of Luiz Viana, the Governor of Bahia state (1896–1900), and of Prudente de Moraes, President of Brazil (1894–1898). Finally, Antônio Conselheiro’s sermons<sup>3</sup> published by Ataliba Nogueira will be an important source to understand his theology. As secondary sources, I will examine the work of scholars such as José Calasans, Edmundo Muniz, Robert Levine, Maria Isaura de Pereira Queiroz, and Walnice Nogueira Galvão, which usually portray the events of Canudos as a consequence of the political changes that the country was going through. The topics of millenarianism and messianism will be covered through the works of important scholars on this field: Norman Cohn, Yonina Talmon, Wilson Wallis, Maria I. P. Queiroz, Henri Desroche, and Catherine Wessinger.

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<sup>2</sup> Catherine Wessinger, *Arnie Besant and Progressive Messianism (1847–1933)* (Lewiston: Mellen, 1988), 24.

<sup>3</sup> The original page number of Antônio Conselheiro’s manuscript will be provided in parenthesis within the footnote reference.

This study will consider the following questions: What were the Canudos community's beliefs? What was their self-understanding? Who was the leader Antônio Conselheiro? How did other segments of Brazilian society perceive the community? How is the community portrayed by newspapers and other documents? What was the nature of the relationship between Canudos and the Catholic church? How did the community understand its relationship with government authority? Why did the members of the community think it was necessary to live apart from society in general? Were they, in fact, lunatics, as was frequently alleged at the time? What did Antônio Conselheiro reveal in his writings about his own ideas and the reasons for the community's practices? Finally, can Canudos be considered a messianic-millenarian movement in every aspect?

Given the space limitations of this thesis, more complex subjects such as the political context of the backland and changes in the Catholic church's approach and theology will not be addressed. I will focus on the elements related to the events of Canudos, the life of its leader, and the lives and beliefs of his followers, to provide insight into the nature of the community and of Antônio Conselheiro.

This thesis proceeds as follows: chapter two presents an overview of the community and its leader. Chapter three offers an analysis of the terminology used by the scholarship to identify Canudos as a messianic and millenarian movement. Chapter four deals with the theology of Antônio Conselheiro by analyzing the religiosity of the backland and Conselheiro's sermons and notes. Finally, a concluding chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CANUDOS

It is common to hear that there were two Brazils during the nineteenth century, meaning two different realities. One Brazil was located at the coast, with its big cities, contact with other countries, and intellectuals with their theories and studies; the other one was the backland, a place where religion played a huge part in the lives of the population, that lacked news and information, as well as attention from the authorities. The episode of Canudos took place in this second Brazil, at a time when the authorities finally noticed the forgotten part of the nation and decided to make an example out of it.

This chapter will present an overview of Canudos and its leader, which will serve as background information for our subsequent analysis of the theology of this movement using the lens of research on messianism and millennialism.

#### The Community of Canudos

After January 1893, the local rulers started to organize new municipalities, but money was needed to accomplish that, so they raised taxes to fund the reorganization. Consuelo Sampaio, in her book on Canudos, argues for this year as the starting point for the future events involving the supporters of Antônio Conselheiro.<sup>4</sup> The starting point of a pursuit that would end only many years later was a protest that took place on April 10, 1893, in the weekly market of Soure, located around 120 miles away from Canudos. Protesters broke the tablets on which the new tax assessments were posted to show the people's opposition to what they considered unreasonable

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<sup>4</sup> Consuelo Novais Sampaio, *Canudos: Cartas para o Barão* (São Paulo: Câmara Brasileira do Livro, 1999), 36.

taxes.<sup>5</sup> To them these new assessments were proof that the authorities did not understand their reality. According to Sampaio, the amount of taxes was too high for a population which already lived so close to misery. In addition to the increased taxes, the region was going through one of the worst periods of drought—lasting until the beginning of 1895.<sup>6</sup> The protest began with twenty people on April 10<sup>th</sup>, but only fourteen days later the number had increased to about five hundred. During those days, Antônio Conselheiro and his people were passing through Itapicuru in search of a new place to settle, and he decided to join the protestors.<sup>7</sup>

Two factors made this protest important. First, it was the first time that Antônio Conselheiro, a well-known wanderer who built many churches and cemeteries and also preached the word of God, joined a popular protest. Second, it was related to the political dispute present in Bahia at the end of 1800s. The leader of that revolt, José Honorato de Souza Neto, was a political opponent of Francisco Dantas, supporter of “the most authoritative local landowner in Bahia’s northeast.”<sup>8</sup> Even though the political scenario is not part of the present analyses, it is important to know that it played a central part in the decisions made about the future of the Canudos community, reflecting the struggle for power in the region.<sup>9</sup>

Antônio Conselheiro, who considered the Republic to be the devil’s government,<sup>10</sup> reacted by intensifying his preaching against the government. He urged people to stop living in

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<sup>5</sup> The taxation system of the backland markets/fairs was that every producer/vender who would want to sell products at the fair had to pay one tax that was calculated, either by the amount of products, or by the space needed for each vender; also, the vender had to pay for the authorization to sell the products, and each product had a specific tax system. See: Manuel Benício, *O Rei dos Jagunços* (Brasília: Senado Federal, 1997), 161–62.

<sup>6</sup> Sampaio, *Canudos: Cartas*, 37.

<sup>7</sup> Sampaio, *Canudos: Cartas*, 37.

<sup>8</sup> Robert M. Levine, *Vale of Tears: Revisiting the Canudos Massacre in Northeastern Brazil, 1893-1897* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 135.

<sup>9</sup> Sampaio, *Canudos: Cartas*, 31.

<sup>10</sup> Adelino Brandão, *Paraiso Perdido* (São Paulo: IBRASA, 1996), 63.

accordance with the law,<sup>11</sup> and, according to some accounts, his preaching led many villages to stop paying their taxes. The news about his campaigning worried the authorities, and the police were sent to intervene. According to lieutenant Euclides da Cunha, the correspondent of the newspaper *Estado de São Paulo* during the war in 1897, Antônio's group did not have more than two hundred men, almost a thousand including woman and children. Under the influence of the Baron of Jeremoabo, the government sent about thirty-five soldiers to fight the followers of Antônio Conselheiro, but the mission was not successful.<sup>12</sup>

The confrontation with the police happened at Masseté, almost 80 miles from Soure, and about 70 miles away from Canudos, on May 29, 1893 and helped Conselheiro to decide that he and his followers should finally settle down, away from the world and the Republic, to live a peaceful and devoted life, preparing for The End.<sup>13</sup> It was only after Masseté, when the soldiers escaped leaving behind their weapons, that the group was able to possess their first guns; before that, their weapons were mostly axes, hoes, and maces.<sup>14</sup>

Canudos was an abandoned cattle farm that belonged to Dr. Fiel de Carvalho.<sup>15</sup> It was located by the river Vaza-Barris, at the state of Bahia.<sup>16</sup> According to José Calasans, Canudos was in a strategic position, with water in abundance and several roads crossing the hamlet.<sup>17</sup> It was chosen for this reason by Antônio Conselheiro. Besides the old church building, there were

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<sup>11</sup> Euclides da Cunha, *Obras Completas de Euclides da Cunha* (Editora Autch, 2015), chap. 2, Kindle.

<sup>12</sup> Sampaio, *Canudos: Cartas*, 25.

<sup>13</sup> Yara Dulce Bandeira de Ataíde, "As origens do povo do Bom Jesus Conselheiro," *Revista USP* 20 (1994): 90.

<sup>14</sup> Benício, *O Rei*, 167.

<sup>15</sup> After the death of Dr. Fiel de Carvalho, Paulo Fontes, his son-in-law, became the administrator of the leather business. Benício, *O Rei*, 165–66.

<sup>16</sup> Da Cunha, *Obras Completas*, chap. 2, Kindle.

<sup>17</sup> José Calasans, "Canudos: origem e desenvolvimento de um arraial messiânico," *Revista da Academia de Letras da Bahia* 34 (January 1987), 48.

still about fifty shacks left,<sup>18</sup> and two business places.<sup>19</sup> The community of Antônio Conselheiro occupied an area of about 0.20 square miles, with the majority of the houses being quite small.<sup>20</sup> Canudos was renamed *Belo Monte* (Beautiful Mount) by Antônio Conselheiro, and its fame spread as the promised land—a place where milk and honey were in abundance, and even the margins of the river were made of “cuscuz,” a traditional Northeastern food made of cornmeal, water and salt. The myth of Canudos had started.<sup>21</sup>

According to Calasans, the community developed in four stages. First, Canudos was inhabited, though sparsely, when Antônio and his followers first arrived; second, a group of followers came with Antônio Conselheiro; third, backlanders came from the neighboring villages and towns between 1893 and 1896; and finally, some families joined the community after the war started in 1896, aiming to help and defend Conselheiro in those difficult times.<sup>22</sup>

Scholars still debate the population figures for Canudos. Queiroz argues for eight thousand people, while others say there were more than twenty thousand.<sup>23</sup> Colonel José Américo, in a letter to the Baron of Jeremoabo, his cousin, wrote in 1894 that the number of people in the community was over sixteen thousand.<sup>24</sup> At the end of the war, on October 1897, 5,200 mud-and-

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<sup>18</sup> Da Cunha, *Obras Completas*, chap. 2, Kindle.

<sup>19</sup> Benício, *O Rei*, 166.

<sup>20</sup> The majority of the houses were about 40m<sup>2</sup>. Ataíde, “As origens do povo,” 91.

<sup>21</sup> Ataíde, “As origens do povo,” 91.

<sup>22</sup> Calasans, “Canudos: origem e desenvolvimento,” 54.

<sup>23</sup> Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz, *O Messianismo no Brasil e no Mundo* (São Paulo: Dominus, 1965), 207; César Zama, *Libelo republicano acompanhado de comentários sobre a Campanha de Canudos* (Salvador: Universidade Federal da Bahia, Centro de Estudos Baianos, 1899), 29; Ataíde, “As origens do povo,” 93; Levine, *Vale of Tears*, 16.

<sup>24</sup> Sampaio, *Canudos: Cartas*, 97.

wattle huts<sup>25</sup> could be counted in the maze of alleys that was the settlement.<sup>26</sup> Assuming that each house belonged to a family of five, the total population would be about 26,000, which according to Calasans, is an exaggeration.<sup>27</sup> A letter from Sergeant Jacinto Ferreira da Silva, a resident of Canudos, mentions three houses he had for sale.<sup>28</sup> The fact that there was a “real estate” business in Canudos indicates that some houses were not inhabited, and a population number based on the total number of houses might not reflect the reality. Yet there is no doubt that it was a large community—the second most populated in the entire state.<sup>29</sup>

The followers of Antônio Conselheiro came from many places, such as the states of Sergipe and Ceará, but mostly from the towns of Bahia, and usually from places that Conselheiro had visited during his time as a wandering preacher. Even though most of the residents of Canudos were mestizos, the number of freed slaves was high. Several letters addressed to the Baron of Jeremoabo talked about Conselheiro’s people, using language like “the people from May 13” (1888), or the word *carijés*—both references to those who had been slaves<sup>30</sup>. Antero Galo, Jeremoabo’s best friend, also says that the number of Caucasian people in the community was considerable low.<sup>31</sup>

Another characteristic of Canudos was the sacrifice families made to be there. Many of

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<sup>25</sup> The housing style was very simple—mud-and-wattle huts with three small rooms each, and not bigger than 600 ft<sup>2</sup>. The light inside of the huts was limited. There were no beds and no tables, only hammocks, two or three stools, a few other things such as boxes, baskets, and a small oratory located in the bedroom. During its heyday, the people were able to build twelve huts per day, due to the simplicity of the construction. Da Cunha, *Os Sertões*, chap. 2, Kindle.

<sup>26</sup> Edmundo Moniz, *Canudos: A Guerra Social*, 2nd ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Elo, 1987), 44.

<sup>27</sup> Calasans, “Canudos: origem e desenvolvimento,” 56.

<sup>28</sup> Ataíde, “As origens do povo,” 93.

<sup>29</sup> J. C. Ataliba Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro e Canudos: Revisão Histórica* (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1974), 11.

<sup>30</sup> *Carijés* comes from Eduardo Carijé, who was a fearless abolitionist. Sampaio, *Canudos: Cartas*, 43.

<sup>31</sup> Sampaio, *Canudos: Cartas*, 42–43; 152; 160.



them sold all that they owned to live near the leader of the Belo Monte.<sup>32</sup> They often sold their lands, homes, and livestock considerably below market prices, probably because they were in a hurry to arrive at Canudos. According to Calasans, many families that moved to Canudos had a comfortable life before, as evidenced by numerous property documents found in the huts after the war was over.

In addition, living in Canudos required the payment of two fees. The first was applied to the new arrivals, who were to give a third of the value of their possessions to be deposited in the community's trust fund. The second was related to the production of the residents, a third of which was directed to the community.<sup>33</sup> As a result of this assessment, it is possible to identify people of differing social and economic status in the community. Since the moment they were welcomed into the community, their right of property was assured and privileges were kept.<sup>34</sup> They were not forced to live according to a "standard communal behavior," and they were not prisoners either, having the liberty to leave Canudos at any time they thought necessary.<sup>35</sup>

The life in the village was simple. They spent the days building houses and the new church, farming food for their subsistence, engaging in commerce, and producing various handcrafted items. In other words, they worked at what was necessary for the life of the community.<sup>36</sup> There were a few residents that worked in the nearby farms.<sup>37</sup> There was a teacher for the children, Maria Francisca de Vasconcellos, who was twenty-three years old and came from an adjacent

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<sup>32</sup> Queiroz, *O Messianismo*, 207.

<sup>33</sup> Queiroz, *O Messianismo*, 212.

<sup>34</sup> Calasans, "Canudos: origem e desenvolvimento," 61–62.

<sup>35</sup> Levine, *Vale of Tears*, 133.

<sup>36</sup> Queiroz, *O Messianismo*, 214.

<sup>37</sup> Levine, *Vale of Tears*, 133.

village.<sup>38</sup> Conselheiro set down rules, based on religious practices, that were to be followed by the entire community in order to guarantee peace and order. At dusk, every day, men and women were separated into two groups to pray for two hours.<sup>39</sup> After this, Antônio Conselheiro preached and the long service ended with the “kissing” of the images,<sup>40</sup> a common practice in the backland during the 1800s.<sup>41</sup>

The social structure of the community was quite complex. There was a hierarchy in this theocratic society, in which Antônio Conselheiro was the ultimate leader. Around the Conselheiro were the “twelve apostles” who functioned as a Council. Each of them had a specific responsibility: João Abade, Conselheiro’s right-hand man, was responsible for any war matters; the brothers Antônio Vilanova and Honório Vilanova served respectively as justice of the peace and manager of the community’s possessions; Antônio Beatinho, was Conselheiro’s acolyte, who supervised all religious matters and coordinated a group of eight women who cooked, sewed, and did other chores around the Belo Monte. There were other functionaries as well, including two special guards: the *Guarda Católica* and the *Companhia do Bom Jesus*. Members of both groups had uniforms that distinguished them from the rest of the population. The *Guarda Católica*, which was a full-time militia, oversaw defense against the army, or any other possible threat. The *Companhia do Bom Jesus*, with 800 members, both men and women, worked as a brotherhood responsible for the safety of Antônio Conselheiro.<sup>42</sup>

Because of the events at Masseté in 1893, the government did not deal with Canudos until

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<sup>38</sup> Benicio, *O Rei*, 170.

<sup>39</sup> Queiroz, *O Messianismo*, 214.

<sup>40</sup> Da Cunha, *Os Sertões*, chap. 2, Kindle.

<sup>41</sup> Queiroz, *O Messianismo*, 214.

<sup>42</sup> Queiroz, *O Messianismo*, 210.

1895, when the governor, Rodrigues de Lima (1892–96), asked Archbishop Jerônimo Tomé da Silva for assistance. They decided to send a delegation of two Capuchins, the Italians João Evangelista de Monte Marciano and Caetano de São Leo, guided by Father Sabino, to pacify the community. Father Sabino was a priest from Cumbe, located 50 miles away from Canudos, who used to come fortnightly to celebrate weddings, baptism and other sacraments at the community.<sup>43</sup> Recently arrived in Brazil, the two Capuchins were hindered in connecting with the people by their lack of cultural knowledge of the backland. In fact, their attempt to speak against Conselheiro merely further irritated the people. The worst moment of their visit was when Father João Evangelista preached about respecting the authorities, which caused great anger against them. The Capuchins' visit in Canudos from May 13 to May 21 resulted in an eight-page report,<sup>44</sup> in which Father João Evangelista characterized Antônio Conselheiro and his people as a group of fanatics and their community as a political-religious sect.<sup>45</sup>

Many authors criticize Father João Evangelista's report because of what lay behind it. Alexandre Otten, for example explains that when the government asked for the church's help the church saw an opportunity beyond restoring peace to society, namely, to be responsible for the spiritual guidance of the nation. It was a chance for the church to become once again the dispenser of the "divine truth."<sup>46</sup> To help achieve this goal, the report sought Conselheiro's punishment, stating that Canudos was a "state inside the state," and made sure that from that

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<sup>43</sup> Nertan Macedo, *Memorial de Vilanova* (Rio de Janeiro: O Cruzeiro, 1964), 69.

<sup>44</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 14.

<sup>45</sup> João Evangelista de Monte Marciano, *Relatório apresentado pelo Revd. Frei João Evangelista de Monte Marciano ao Arcebispado da Bahia sobre Antônio Conselheiro e seu sequito no Arraial de Canudos, 1895* (Salvador: Centro de Estudos Baianos, 1987).

<sup>46</sup> Alexandre Otten, "Só Deus é Grande," *Perspectiva Teológica* 21 (1989): 38.

point on the sect would have to deal not with the church but with the authorities.<sup>47</sup>

### Antônio Conselheiro

The leader of the Belo Monte became well-known as a result of his skills in construction, preaching, and his ability to lead the wealthy in the community to share with the poor,<sup>48</sup> but he did not share much about his own life.<sup>49</sup> It is known that in 1828, Antônio Vicente Mendes Maciel was born in Quixeramobim in the state of Ceará, Brazil. His father, Vicente Maciel,<sup>50</sup> was a businessman and the owner of a few houses in the village. Because his father was relatively well off, Antônio Maciel had the opportunity to study French and Latin, besides Portuguese.<sup>51</sup> When he was six, his mother passed away. His father remarried, and between these two marriages, Antônio had four sisters: Francisca and Maria from the first marriage, Dorotéia and Rufina from the second marriage. Moniz speaks about Antônio's childhood as being full of frustrations and sadness because his stepmother mistreated him.<sup>52</sup>

The feud was a common way to solve conflicts between families in the backland during the 1800s, and it interfered in the lives of many people, including Antônio Maciel. In 1833, when Antônio was five, a quarrel between the Araújo family and the Maciels led to a feud. His family was accused by the Araújos of stealing—falsely according to Moniz.<sup>53</sup> They wanted the Maciels expelled from the region. Several relatives from both families died in the disputes, including

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<sup>47</sup> Otten, "Só Deus é Grande," 38.

<sup>48</sup> José Aras, *Sangue de Irmãos* (Salvador, 1953), 150.

<sup>49</sup> Macedo, *Memorial de Vilanova*, 40.

<sup>50</sup> Benício, *O Rei*, 16.

<sup>51</sup> Benício, *O Rei*, 35; Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 4.

<sup>52</sup> Moniz, *Canudos*, 15; Macedo, *Memorial de Vilanova*, 40.

<sup>53</sup> Moniz, *Canudos*, 17.

Maciel's grandfather.<sup>54</sup> It seems likely that his father did not take any part in this battle, and kept living a normal life until his death in 1855. After that, Antônio Maciel took over his father's business, honored his debts, and watched over three of his four sisters, until they were married and had families of their own.

With everything in order, Antônio focused on himself. He got married in 1857, but the marriage was a failure. There are different accounts of this event, but the most accepted one says that he married his cousin, Brasilina Laurentina de Lima,<sup>55</sup> and due to a difficult relationship with his mother-in-law, he decided to move to Sobral where he worked in commerce. After that, the family moved to Campo Grande, where he worked as a legal clerk; then to Ipu, where greater opportunity led to work at the Court House. In Ipu, his marriage finally ended, and his wife abandoned him to run away with a *furriel*—a noncommissioned soldier of intermediate rank between a corporal and a sergeant<sup>56</sup>—called João da Mata.<sup>57</sup> Another version of the story, however, does not speak of disagreements with his mother-in-law because Brasilina was already an orphan. But all the accounts agree on one thing: Antônio Maciel was abandoned by Brasilina. Of her fate, not much is known. The most common account is that she was later abandoned by the *furriel* and died in misery. There is little information about the children born of Antônio Maciel's first marriage. Some accounts say that Brasilina took their two boys with her and the *furriel*, while others say that Antônio Maciel left the children at his mother-in-law's house a year later.<sup>58</sup> Because of this event, some said that Maciel started to walk around the countryside to

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<sup>54</sup> Moniz, *Canudos*, 19.

<sup>55</sup> Levine, *Vale of Tears*, 123.

<sup>56</sup> Levine, *Vale of Tears*, 123.

<sup>57</sup> Moniz, *Canudos*, 21.

<sup>58</sup> Levine, *Vale of Tears*, 123.

find Brasilina and get his revenge, while others concluded he had become insane as the result of his disappointment.<sup>59</sup>

Although Euclides da Cunha speaks dismissively about the different jobs<sup>60</sup> Antônio Maciel worked on and the different cities he lived in,<sup>61</sup> those experiences were vital for him. They enabled him to learn about the reality of the backland and to understand the misery and injustice that the backlanders faced every day. For this reason, Moniz offers a positive assessment of Antônio Maciel's wanderings.

Antônio Conselheiro did not arise as a meteor. It took him many years of peregrination and fellowship with the backlanders to listen to their aspirations, to make himself well known, to attract supporters and finally to become the leader of an ideal community that had an impact on the backland.<sup>62</sup>

Levine concluded that Antônio Maciel became the character that he was because of the unique religious environment that tended to combine "everyday stoicism and resignation with messianic hopes"<sup>63</sup> found in the backland.

A couple of years after the end of his marriage, Antônio Maciel started a relationship with Joana Imaginária, a woman who made saints' figures out of wood and clay. They had one child, named Joaquim Aprígio.<sup>64</sup> Apparently, Joana stayed in Santa Quitéria rather than accompanying Maciel on his mission in 1865.

After leaving his wife and child, Antônio traveled to different cities. He stopped to visit

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<sup>59</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 5.

<sup>60</sup> Among the different jobs Antônio Maciel worked we can name traveling salesman, manager, teacher, shop clerk, registrar, lawyer (unlicensed), proctor, and builder. Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 5.

<sup>61</sup> "Nota-se já [...] o descambar para a vadiagem franca." Da Cunha, *Obras Completas*, chap. 2, Kindle.

<sup>62</sup> "Antônio Conselheiro não surgiu como um meteoro. Precisou de largos anos de peregrinação e de contato com as massas sertanejas para auscultar-lhes as aspirações, fazer-se conhecido, conquistar adeptos e tomar-se finalmente o chefe de um ideal comunitário que comoveu o sertão." Moniz, *Canudos*, 24.

<sup>63</sup> Levine, *Vale of Tears*, 34.

<sup>64</sup> According to Moniz, Joaquim went to Canudos to visit his father in 1895 and brought him a gift from Joana Imaginária. Moniz, *Canudos*, 50.

one of his sisters and, while there, had a disagreement with his brother-in-law, Loureiro Correia Lima. The police became involved, but his brother-in-law decided to drop the charges because Antônio had apologized for losing his temper during their discussion. Then, in the years 1869 to 1871, Antônio Maciel stayed in a place called Várzea da Pedra until an old creditor from Quixeramobim sued him for unpaid debts. Maciel did not deny it, but there was nothing else left for him to sell to pay the debt, so he took to wandering once again. He visited the states of Pernambuco, Alagoas, and in 1874 he went to Sergipe. After that he went to Northern Bahia, where he would stay until his death in 1897.

As a wandering preacher, Antônio Conselheiro, would have been a familiar type in the backland. The spiritual assistance provided by the Catholic church was not enough to attend to the backland of Northeastern Brazil, and wandering missionaries were part of the region's scenery to help with the Christian instruction of the population.<sup>65</sup> Wanderers and missionaries had been part of the lives of the population for a long time when Antônio appeared.

Until mid-1870s, Antônio Maciel was known as Brother Antônio and Antônio dos Mares. He was not yet the messianic figure and leader known in Canudos. He began to gain notoriety because of his wise counsels and preaching,<sup>66</sup> and after that, Brother Antônio developed into Antônio Conselheiro, that is, "the counselor."<sup>67</sup>

In 1876, Conselheiro was accused of assassination. His victims were supposedly his mother and his wife. Taken to Ceará to face charges, he, perhaps trying to imitate Jesus Christ, did not

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<sup>65</sup> Levine, *Vale of Tears*, 33.

<sup>66</sup> Moniz, *Canudos*, 124; Queiroz, *O Messianismo*, 201.

<sup>67</sup> Antônio Maciel was inspired in his life as missionary by José Antônio Pereira Ibiapina, a former judge that became a priest, who was a renowned missionary from Ceará. Moniz, *Canudos*, 24. About Father Ibiapina, see: Georgette Desrochers, "Simpósio sobre o Padre Ibiapina." *Perspectiva Teológica* vol. 15 (1983), 271–277.

defend himself. The police responsible for his transport assaulted him,<sup>68</sup> and at his arrival, Conselheiro was badly hurt and in a noticeable state of malnutrition. Conselheiro's diet was very simple. He did not drink alcohol or eat meat, and his only nourishment was grains, so to say that he was noticeably malnourished meant that he was visibly weak. In fact, his whole lifestyle was simple. He wore a denim tunic, like the cassocks of the missionaries that used to wander through the region,<sup>69</sup> sandals and a brimmed hat. His hair and beard were long. He did not sleep in beds or hammocks but on tables, benches, or the floor, without pillows and blankets. If somebody gave him four dollars, he would return three dollars saying that he did not need more than one dollar.<sup>70</sup> A couple of months after his arrest, on August 1, 1876, the authorities recognized the misunderstanding, and Antônio Conselheiro was released. He returned to Bahia to gather his followers. Now he was a martyr, an innocent victim of the system.<sup>71</sup>

Antônio's reputation spread throughout the region, and the number of devotees started to grow. He first established a settlement in Itapicuru named *Bom Jesus* (Good Jesus). Conselheiro lived there for almost twelve years, until 1893.<sup>72</sup> After the Republic was proclaimed (1889), he started walking towards the desert places of the backland looking for a quiet place to wait for the last Judgment Day, inaugurate a New Jerusalem, and most of all, stay away from the "antichrist" that the Republican system represented.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 7.

<sup>69</sup> "Camisolão azul, sem cintura; chapéu de abas largas derrubadas, e sandálias. Às costas um surrão de couro em que trazia papel, pena e tinta, a Missão Abreviada e as Horas Marianas. Vivia de esmolas, das quais recusava qualquer excesso, pedindo apenas o sustento de cada dia. Procurava os pousos solitários. Não aceitava leito algum, além de uma tábua nua e, na falta desta, o chão duro." Da Cunha, *Obras Completas*, chap. 2, Kindle, author's own translation.

<sup>70</sup> Benício, *O Rei*, 47.

<sup>71</sup> Moniz, *Canudos*, 28.

<sup>72</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 9.

<sup>73</sup> Queiroz, *O Messianismo*, 204.



As he traveled from place to place, Conselheiro offered to rebuild churches and cemeteries, and in return he would be given permission to preach. In February 1882, a letter from Archbishop Dom Luis Antônio dos Santos went out to parish priests in the archdiocese declaring Conselheiro *persona non grata*.<sup>74</sup> Several priests ignored the Archbishop's order because they did not see a problem with lay preaching. Otten explains this reaction as the result of a division among the Catholic clergy. On one side, the "old clergy," who saw no problem with lay preaching, were thought of as "less enlightened." On the other side, the "reformed clergy" were thought to understand the sacredness of their ministry and, therefore, saw the permission granted to Conselheiro to preach as a serious problem.<sup>75</sup>

Even though Antônio Conselheiro understood the changes brought to Brazil as merely different forms of exploitation, he did agree with the abolition of slavery.<sup>76</sup> Brazil was the last country in the Western world to abolish slavery on May 13, 1888. In his exhortations from January of 1897, Antônio wrote:

Her highness princess Isabel ended slavery, and did nothing but follow heaven's rule; because the time intended by God to free this people from that humiliating condition had come [...] The day on which God would put an end to all that cruelty, moved by his compassion for his people, whom he sets free from that vicious slavery, has finally come.<sup>77</sup>

Conselheiro did not consider slavery something that God had intended for his children. Most of the accounts about the community of Canudos speak of the substantial number of African descendants among the followers. Even before 1888 the numbers were already high, and

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<sup>74</sup> Levine, *Vale of Tears*, 125.

<sup>75</sup> Otten, "Só Deus é Grande," 9.

<sup>76</sup> Benicio, *O Rei*, 95.

<sup>77</sup> "Sua alteza a senhora Dona Isabel libertou a escravidão, que não fez mais do que cumprir a ordem do céu; porque era chegada o tempo marcado por Deus para libertar esse povo de semelhante estado. [...] Chegou enfim o dia em que Deus tinha de pôr termo a tanta crueldade, movido de compaixão a favor de seu povo e ordena para que se liberte de tão penosa escravidão." Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 180–81, author's own translation.

besides the freeborn, there were also some fugitive slaves that found a peaceful place and a chance of a new beginning within the community. After 1888, several freed slaves migrated to look for shelter in Bahia's backland, causing the numbers at Canudos to increase even more.<sup>78</sup>

On November 15, 1889, Brazil ceased to be known as *Império do Brasil* and adopted the official name of *Estados Unidos do Brasil*, initiating a new chapter in its history. The Republic was something weird to the simple-minded, something that nobody really cared to explain, with the result that they feared they would lose their liberty and their belongings once again. They noticed changes, such as religious marriage being replaced by civil marriage, the separation between church affairs and state affairs, and most of all, an increase in taxes. Manoel Benicio, journalist and author of the book *O Rei dos Jagunços*, notes that Conselheiro started to preach against the Republic, not because he knew indeed what that system was, but because the Republic, in his understanding, was threatening his religion.<sup>79</sup> Antônio Conselheiro knew how to deal with people. "His ideas were good," according to Benicio, "and so were his intentions,"<sup>80</sup> and that is the major reason Canudos became such a stronghold. However, amid the political turmoil of those days, Antônio Conselheiro was identified as a dangerous opponent.

### **The Encounters**

Because Conselheiro and his people improved the towns they passed through during the time of the monarchy, the people of the region, the church, and even the government authorities thought of them as "good people." After the declaration of the republic, however, their status changed. Antônio's sermons against the new government started to disturb the politicians of the

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<sup>78</sup>Ataide, "As origens do povo," 90.

<sup>79</sup> Benicio, *O Rei*, 158.

<sup>80</sup> Benicio, *O Rei*, 48.

backland, and he became an enemy to the authorities.<sup>81</sup>

The first encounter between the followers of Conselheiro and the Brazilian authorities initiated a war that no one could have imagined. According to Nogueira, the responsibility for it lay with one man—the judge Arlindo Leoni.<sup>82</sup> The conflict began when Antônio Conselheiro had purchased a special kind of wood for the new church he was building in the community, paid in advance, and waited for the delivery. A couple of months later, the wood was not delivered, nor had the money been returned. Antônio decided to wait a little longer, but he let it be known that if the problem was not resolved, he and his followers would go to the town of Juazeiro to get the wood themselves. This decision was seen as an attack on the town, and judge Leoni wrote to governor Viana to send help. Viana responded with a hundred soldiers to fight the *conselheiristas*. They arrived at Uauá, on November 19, 1896, under Lieutenant Pires Ferreira. Remarkably, when the battle took place five days later, Conselheiro had his first victory.<sup>83</sup> In addition, the soldiers, after their defeat, robbed the town's residents, killed some of them, and burned some of the business. Their conduct dismayed the government officials who had dispatched them to protect the town. Now, besides worrying about the *conselheiristas*, those in authority also needed to remedy the terrible behavior of their army units in order to reestablish the population's trust.<sup>84</sup>

After two more defeats—the second with six hundred soldiers and the third with twelve hundred—the fourth and last expedition against the *conselheiristas* was organized on July 1897 under General Artur Oscar. Three months later they arrived at Canudos. The long march resulted

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<sup>81</sup> Queiroz, *O Messianismo*, 215.

<sup>82</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 19.

<sup>83</sup> Benício, *O Rei*, 175.

<sup>84</sup> Sampaio, *Canudos: Cartas*, 56.

from the famine that the troops experienced, leading some to say that the worst enemy in the entire campaign was hunger.<sup>85</sup> This food shortage was man made. One of the strategies of the Canudos fighters was to destroy the Army's food. They could not take the food for themselves because Antônio Conselheiro did not allow it. He declared that nothing could come from the republicans and the "antichrist" except for guns and ammunition.<sup>86</sup> Oscar's army of more than ten thousand soldiers received new hope when the Minister of War, Marshal Carlos Bittencourt, arrived at Bahia on August 8 to arrange for more food for them.<sup>87</sup> Towards the end of September General Oscar received orders to besiege Canudos in order to deny its residents access to food and water.

This strategy worked, and by October 2, a white flag was seen among the ruins left from the attacks to the town. Antônio Beatinho, the acolyte of Conselheiro, had come out and asked to negotiate with General Oscar. He proposed the surrender of those who no longer wished to stay at Canudos, mostly women and children, and the general agreed. According to the journalist Colonel Favila Nunes, a correspondent of the war for the *Gazeta de Notícias*, over five hundred women and children and around sixty men surrendered that day; all of them were in terrible condition. Nunes concluded that it was all part of a plan, the "rebels" just wanted to remove the ones they considered to be a burden, so they could keep attacking.<sup>88</sup>

Two days later, Canudos became an enormous funeral pyre, torched and dynamited by the government troops. Witnesses described a dreadful smell of burned meat and terrible cries from the people who were still alive inside the town when the fire started. Conselheiro's followers

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<sup>85</sup> Sampaio, *Canudos: Cartas*, 72.

<sup>86</sup> Queiroz, *O Messianismo*, 216.

<sup>87</sup> Walnice Nogueira Galvão, *No Calor da Hora: a Guerra de Canudos nos Jornais: 4a. Expedição*, 3rd ed. (São Paulo: Ática, 1994), 176.

<sup>88</sup> Galvão, *No Calor*, 202.

considered it an honor to die rather than give up their beliefs, since they were certain that they would be saved in eternity. On October 6, Canudos finally fell.

Antônio Conselheiro's body was found buried inside the sanctuary in an advanced state of decomposition; he had probably died before September 22. According to Captain Manuel Benicio, Conselheiro had been wounded at the beginning of September when a projectile went through his legs. Antônio Beatinho tried to take care of the wound but there was no water left for that. Conselheiro decided that, to avoid despair, his remaining followers should not know about his injury.<sup>89</sup> Almost seventy years old and very weak, he did not have the strength to resist much longer. After his death, his followers refused to bury him for almost a week because they were waiting for his resurrection.<sup>90</sup>

Government officials assured the people remaining in Canudos that all of those who surrendered would be taken prisoners rather than executed. Their end, however, was the *gravata vermelha*, the red tie—death by the slitting of their throats.<sup>91</sup> The survivors of the war were those who had left the settlement before the fourth campaign surrounded Canudos. They would be the ones speaking of the dream of a simple life of living their faith that the Belo Monte represented to those who decided to move there.

By 1902 the town was coming alive again. Slowly the backlanders were building their mud-brick houses. Five decades later it was decided to transform the region of Canudos into a water reservoir to provide water to the population and, once more, to destroy the memories of Antônio Conselheiro's town. Construction started in 1951 and finished in the 1960s.<sup>92</sup> In 1986,

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<sup>89</sup> Benicio, *O Rei*, 379.

<sup>90</sup> Levine, *Vale of Tears*, 185.

<sup>91</sup> Benicio, *O Rei*, 324.

<sup>92</sup> Sampaio, *Canudos: Cartas*, 84.

the government of Bahia authorized the creation of the Canudos State Park at the old Canudos site, which was opened in the 1990s. The University of Bahia was charged with the site's preservation and archeological work.<sup>93</sup> As a result, the history of Canudos is at last being told from the viewpoint of the conquered.

### How Society Saw Canudos

The power Antônio Conselheiro had to inspire people—not only the poor but also those from other strata of society—led political leaders, church officials and the landlords to create an image of a man who was feared by all, who led a community that needed to be controlled as soon as possible. President Prudente de Moraes, in his speech to the Congress on May 3, 1897, called the people of Canudos “fanatics, bandits, and rebels,” and spoke of them being used as tools for those who were still dreaming of a restoration of the monarchy.<sup>94</sup> According to the President, the community was an embarrassment to Brazilian society, and he expressed his conviction that the troops would be able to win the battle against ignorance and criminality.<sup>95</sup>

Almost three months after the end of the Canudos war, Afonso Arinos published an article in *O Comércio de São Paulo* that painted a different picture of the conflict, from which the following is an excerpt.

What was the reason for the Canudos war?

Until the present day there is nothing on record saying that it was because of crimes or robberies caused by the backlanders. It was not due to a religious motive either, because the federal Constitution guarantees the right of religious freedom; riot or revolution was also not the reason since the backlanders did not leave Canudos to depose any authority.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Universidade do Estado da Bahia, <http://www.uneb.br/canudos/parque-estadual-de-canudos-pec/>

<sup>94</sup> Prudente de Moraes, *Mensagem apresentada ao Congresso Nacional na Abertura da 1ª sessão da 3ª legislatura pelo presidente da República*, 1897, 6.

<sup>95</sup> De Moraes, *Mensagem apresentada ao Congresso*, 7.

<sup>96</sup> “Por que razão começou a guerra? Até hoje não consta que se originasse de crimes ou assaltos praticados

According to Arinos, one of the reasons for the war was the fact that some of the politicians from Bahia, including Luiz Viana, turned against Conselheiro after he had refused their request for his support during their campaigns for office. Viana was elected governor of Bahia and served from 1896 to 1900, during the period of the war. The governor, in an interview dated August 7 in the *Gazeta de Noticias*, explained to Favila Nunes that Canudos was one of those accidents that have multiple causes. In his letter to the President, Viana pointed out how the movement was organized and became a religious group. He added that they had become a threat to the public order only after they stopped following the law and respecting the authorities.<sup>97</sup> José Gonçalves, a former governor of Bahia state, in an interview in August 1897, stated that the only thing he had heard about Antônio Conselheiro was that he was a religious fanatic who hated the Republic and the republicans and now was an amazing fighter.<sup>98</sup>

The role of the press during the years of the Canudos war was vital for the understanding of its events by the society in general. The whole country came to know Belo Monte and Antônio Conselheiro through the daily coverage of the Brazilian press—something that had never happened before.<sup>99</sup> As a result, historians have to wonder how faithfully Canudos was portrayed by the newspapers. Walnice Galvão explains that the newspapers during those years were extremely important, since everything was registered there, but she also points out how easy it

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pelos jagunços. Por motivo religioso, não foi, porque a Constituição federal garante a liberdade religiosa; por motivo de sedição ou revolução, também não foi, porque os jagunços não tinham saído de Canudos para deporem nenhuma autoridade.” *O Comércio de São Paulo*, December 22, 1897, quoted in Galvão, *No Calor*, 104, author’s own translation.

<sup>97</sup> *Gazeta de Noticias*, August 7, 1897, quoted in Galvão, *No Calor*, 140.

<sup>98</sup> *Gazeta de Noticias*, August 27, 1897, quoted in Galvão, *No Calor*, 154.

<sup>99</sup> Levine, *Vale of Tears*, 24.

was to manipulate the truth.<sup>100</sup> Levine amplifies the point, stating that this was the first time in Brazil that the newspapers were used “to create a sense of public panic.”<sup>101</sup>

Many claimed that a monarchist conspiracy lay behind Conselheiro and his community. In September 1897, the newspaper *O País* published a series of stories pointing out that Canudos was indeed involved with monarchist groups. Their connection started in southernmost Brazil with a civil war known as *Revolução Federalista* (1893-95), a conflict between republicans, federalists (supported by Uruguay), and frustrated monarchists that demanded more autonomy for the provinces.<sup>102</sup> The article asserted that the conspirators responsible for the Southern civil war were spreading their ideals to the Brazilian Northeast.<sup>103</sup> The newspaper *A Notícia* published a letter from General Artur Oscar, who commanded the troops at Canudos, saying that he had proof that Antônio Conselheiro and his community were involved in a monarchist conspiracy, citing letters (later demonstrated to be forgeries) from Conselheiro’s followers with comments like “be sure that the Republic will end soon,” “the prince is the true owner of Brazil,” and “those who are republicans should move to the United States.”<sup>104</sup>

Writing about the war of Canudos at the beginning of the twentieth century, Nina Rodrigues, a professor of forensic medicine, said that the backlanders could not understand the political changes occurring in the country during those years due to their lack of intelligence and inability to comprehend the new liberal, and more complex, system of government.<sup>105</sup> Therefore,

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<sup>100</sup> Galvão, *No Calor*, 18.

<sup>101</sup> Levine, *Vale of Tears*, 24.

<sup>102</sup> Sandra J. Pesavento, *A Revolução Federalista* (Brasiliense: São Paulo, 1983), 14.

<sup>103</sup> *O País*, September 9, 1897, quoted in Galvão, *No Calor*, 55.

<sup>104</sup> Galvão, *No Calor*, 70–72.

<sup>105</sup> Nina Rodrigues, in a search for congenital abnormalities, examined Antônio Conselheiro’s head after the war was over in 1897. His conclusion was that he had a normal brain, with no deformity of any kind.



he concluded that they would be monarchists until they had developed intellectually.<sup>106</sup> His analysis is a good example of how the backlanders were seen by the people living on Brazil's coasts.

Seen by some as part of a monarchist plot and as a group of fanatics and unwise by others, the people of Canudos were rarely viewed as Brazilians, or even as human beings. They were the fanatics, the *jagunços*, the rebels. Those who wrote about the community chose their words carefully and with an eye to discouraging any possible feeling of sympathy towards the "fanatics." This word was used most often in the international dispatches to describe the people living at Canudos, followed by rebels, insurgents, and revolutionaries. The terminology adopted to describe the backlanders for public consumption in the national newspapers, besides the well-known "fanatics," was "*jagunço*." *Jagunço* was a regional expression used to describe a hired gunman, but during the Canudos war, it became a synonym for backlander. The distance created by these terms between the population in general and the community of Canudos was so vast that even when the command from the government to annihilate everyone found alive in Canudos was reported, no one expressed concern for the people of the community. It was as if they were not worthy of any kind of compassion or sympathy. Galvão has noted that the Brazilian press began to call the people of Canudos Brazilians only at the very end of the war.<sup>107</sup>

The cruelty of the war was something that not everyone was comfortable with. Even Captain Manoel Benício, who was a correspondent for the *Jornal do Comércio*, was subject to censorship when relating events that occurred on the battlefield. When he conveyed information that was not supposed to be written, he was removed as a correspondent.<sup>108</sup> Lelis Piedade, from

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<sup>106</sup> Nina Rodrigues, *As Coletividades Anormais* (Brasília: Senado Federal, Conselho Editorial, 2006), 51–52.

<sup>107</sup> Galvão, *No Calor*, 107.

<sup>108</sup> Sampaio, *Canudos: Cartas*, 72; Galvão, *No Calor*, 113.

the *Jornal de Noticias*, also complained about the need to obtain military approval for every telegram.<sup>109</sup> Years later, in 1899, when Benício published his book about the events of Canudos, *O Rei dos Jagunços*, the truth could finally be told. The original cover of the book had a drawing of a soldier holding a man's head and a small knife pointing to his throat. The third person in the scene is a half-naked woman watching the event with a sad expression, having her hands on her back, knowing that nothing can be done. This was a reference to the slitting of throats that occurred at the end of the war to the prisoners that surrendered.

The Canudos war made the news outside Latin America also, and countries such as the United States, Canada, England, and Scotland received regular dispatches from their correspondents about the events that occurred in Brazil.<sup>110</sup> While some were very detailed in their reports, others demonstrated a failure to grasp basic information, to the point of confusing Brazil with Argentina.<sup>111</sup> The *Los Angeles Times* and *Baltimore Sun* published an impressive number of dispatches about Canudos—a total of fifty-four between them. A portrait of Antônio Conselheiro was published by the *San Francisco Chronicle* on October 7, 1897 and a month later the image of President Prudent de Moraes was on the front page of *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. None of the newspapers explained what the community of Canudos really was or offered significant analysis. In addition, they published a great deal of inaccurate information about how the followers of Conselheiro saw their leader. *The Guardian* from London wrote that there were numerous churches dedicated to the “Messiah.”<sup>112</sup> *The Church Weekly* amplified on this mistaken notion.

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<sup>109</sup> Galvão, *No Calor*, 387.

<sup>110</sup> To have a general idea of the international dispatches, thirteen newspapers from 1897 were examined: one from Scotland, three from England, and nine from the United States (2-California, 1-Georgia, 1-Illinois, 1-Louisiana, 1-Maryland, 1-Missouri, 2-New York).

<sup>111</sup> *The Atlanta Constitution*, February 22, 1897; *Aberdeen Journal and General Advertiser for the North of Scotland*, July 30, 1897; August 4, 1897.

<sup>112</sup> *The Guardian*, July 26, 1897.

[Antônio Conselheiro] claims to heal the sick and possess miraculous powers generally, while his deluded followers call him Jesus Christ, worship the ground he treads on, and even drink the water he bathes in, believing it to have healing virtues.<sup>113</sup>

In fact, in a manuscript found after the end of the war and identified as the notebook that belonged to Conselheiro, he never identified himself as Christ Jesus. On the contrary, he recognizes only one savior and preaches about him: “Jesus Christ, the true Messiah promised by God to the patriarchs, prophesied by the prophets, and expected by both.”<sup>114</sup>

International newspapers also picked up on the idea that Canudos posed the threat of an imperial insurrection. On April 1897, *The Baltimore Sun* dispatched an article using the term “fanatic” between quotation marks with the title “Brazil’s Imperialists,” and explained a supposed plot to reestablish the monarchy. The description of this plot involved the Comte D’Eu, the son-in-law of Dom Pedro II, as planner of the movement, and connected him to Conselheiro as his lieutenant. The last paragraph of the article explained the reason Rio de Janeiro’s journalists applied the epithet “fanatic” to Antônio Conselheiro, namely, that they had “to conceal the political character” of Conselheiro’s movement.<sup>115</sup> The article’s author did not get everything wrong; he also accurately explained what the new government system meant for the majority of the Brazilian population, namely, an increase in taxes for a people who already had a difficult life but were being required to pay for the innovations of the Republic. It is interesting to notice that this article speaks of the people of Canudos as men and women, giving them a humanity that others had taken away.

In June, the British newspaper *The Times*, under the title “The situation in Brazil,” gave a

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<sup>113</sup> “Revel Fanatics in Brazil,” *The Church Weekly*, April 9, 1897.

<sup>114</sup> “Jesus Cristo, verdadeiro Messias prometido por Deus aos patriarcas, profetizado pelos profetas, e por um e outro tño esperado.” Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 116 (274), author’s own translation.

<sup>115</sup> “Brazil’s Imperialists,” *The Baltimore Sun*, April 19, 1897.

summary of the events so far. It explained that Antônio Conselheiro started as a wanderer more than twenty years before the events of 1897. It criticized the extreme republicans who made use of violence for any reason, and lamented how anything of a Conservative character started to be called Monarchism and was held up to “public execration.” The highlight here is that the author clarifies for the public that the movement of Canudos did not present any danger to the population in general:

The movement is not at present dangerous, inasmuch as Conselheiro has no wish to make any revolution against the central Government; but any such situation may develop into a source of danger when unscrupulous politicians are ready to hand to make use of the strength that the support of a large body of armed men can give them.<sup>116</sup>

The article above was translated by the Brazilian newspaper the *República* on July 2, and it was considered by Galvão to offer a more sober-minded opinion about the Brazilian situation.<sup>117</sup>

Antônio Conselheiro, often quoted as the “fanatic leader,” received an interesting compliment from a few newspapers’ reports on October 7, two days after the war was over. Apparently, the original dispatch was that Conselheiro was a combination of “a priest, warrior and man of affairs,” but three newspapers added that he was an “extraordinary individual,” almost sounding a lament for his death, which was very different from the usual news.

In addition to newspaper accounts, other written sources, such as letters to the Baron of Jeremoabo, the most influential and powerful politician and landlord of the region, offer evidence for how the Brazilian public regarded the people of Canudos. Sampaio has analyzed seventy letters from landlords and politicians. In them, the people of Canudos were often called “fanatics” and “criminals,” but the most common word to describe them was “*jagunços*.”

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<sup>116</sup> “The Situation in Brazil,” *The Times*, June 12, 1897.

<sup>117</sup> Galvão, *No Calor*, 76.

Antônio Conselheiro was referred to as, among other epithets, “the lunatic,” “the prophet of Canudos,” “damned lousy,”<sup>118</sup> “terrible monster of Brazil,”<sup>119</sup> or simply Conselheiro.

The first letters date from 1894 and illustrate how these powerful landlords felt when the people started to sell their possessions to move to the Canudos community. Lieutenant Colonel Marcelino Miranda expressed to the Baron how appalled he was when more than sixteen families left the surroundings of the Tucano village to go to Canudos.<sup>120</sup> A month later Colonel Aristides Borges, also a state deputy, wrote speaking of his fear that his village was going to be uninhabited due to the increasing number of people leaving for Canudos.<sup>121</sup> The real problem faced by these officials was not concern for the welfare of those who left but the need to replace their labor. Colonel José Américo Camelo expressed this to his cousin when he wrote that it was impossible to find enough workers for his farm, since people were leaving their houses to follow the Conselheiro to Canudos, which had already grown to sixteen thousand people. The result was that the colonel, and other property owners, had to spend more money to get the hands needed for their agricultural work. A year later, Marcelino Miranda, besides complaining about the problem of not having workers, explained the difficult situation that his town was going through as a result of taxes not being paid and the migration of its population.<sup>122</sup> The fact that the landlords’ finances were being affected played an essential role in the movement against Conselheiro, his community, and its lifestyle.

As time went by, the tone of the correspondence shifted from one of lamentable

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<sup>118</sup> Sampaio, *Canudos: Cartas*, 169.

<sup>119</sup> Sampaio, *Canudos: Cartas*, 221.

<sup>120</sup> Sampaio, *Canudos: Cartas*, 90.

<sup>121</sup> Sampaio, *Canudos: Cartas*, 94.

<sup>122</sup> Sampaio, *Canudos: Cartas*, 99.

inconvenience to one of increased fear for property and a fading hope in the Army. After several encounters between the troops and the followers of Conselheiro in which the Army was defeated, leaving guns and munitions behind for the people of Canudos, the confidence that continued to be shown in the newspaper accounts was not the reality for the local population of Bahia. Benigno Dantas, the Baron's cousin and his partner in politics, admitted in July 1897 that the news and telegrams used to give him more hope, but by then only the facts could do such a thing.<sup>123</sup>

The dispute of power between oligarchies before and after the proclamation of the Republic affected the fate of the community of Canudos, which in many ways was simply a place for those who wanted to preserve their Catholicism.<sup>124</sup> Due to Antônio Conselheiro's position against the new form of government, the community was portrayed as a sect that needed to be destroyed before it corrupted the rest of the country. Canudos served as the scapegoat the powerful leaders needed to strengthen their position in the political arena. Their problem was not the religious view or supposed fanaticism the community, but its political position, and, even more important, the need to restore credibility to the army after its several defeats. Even though Canudos became, back then, a propaganda piece for the defenders of the old regime, Antônio Conselheiro was not part of any monarchist conspiracy, and he did not have any kind of help from Brazilian monarchists.

The end of the war was not celebrated by the academy of Bahia.<sup>125</sup> The politician Rui Barbosa, one of the founders of the Brazilian Academy of Letters, showing his disapproval towards the events of Canudos by talking about the lack of proof for the supposed plot to restore

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<sup>123</sup> Sampaio, *Canudos: Cartas*, 209.

<sup>124</sup> Levine, *Vale of Tears*, 133.

<sup>125</sup> Galvão, *No Calor*, 95.

the monarchy<sup>126</sup> led by Antônio Conselheiro. The community's goal was to leave a peaceful life under the guidance of their spiritual leader and away from the outside world and the system they saw as the antichrist, but that did not happen.

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<sup>126</sup> Galvão, *No Calor*, 95.

## CHAPTER THREE

### MILLENNIALISM AND MESSIANISM

Any consideration of a millennial or messianic movement must take into account the fact that these terms themselves label a variety of movements that arose organically within the history of the church. This chapter is devoted to a consideration of the origin of these terms and their development through time, which in turn will help to explain why Canudos is identified as a messianic-millennarian movement. Even though this chapter will deal extensively with matters of terminology in this field of study, the purpose is not to offer an exhaustive presentation of millennialism, but only to present those things that are helpful to our understanding of Canudos.

The thinking that has come to be labeled as millennialism has its foundation in the book of Revelation, which speaks of a period of one thousand years.<sup>1</sup> The term millennialism includes at least three different subcategories used to label different understandings of this period of a thousand years: Premillennialism (Historic and Dispensational), Postmillennialism, and Amillennialism.

G. Ladd defines Premillennialism as “the doctrine stating that after the Second Coming of Christ, he will reign for a thousand years over the earth before the final consummation of God’s redemptive purpose in the new heavens and the new earth of the Age to Come.”<sup>2</sup> This view is itself divided between two different interpretations, namely, Dispensational and Historic. The first understands that the world would go through seven “dispensations,” meaning seven periods

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation 20.

<sup>2</sup> Robert G. Clouse, *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (Illinois: InterVarsity, 1977), 17.



of time when humankind will be tested in a specific revelation by God.<sup>3</sup> Essentially, the world becomes increasingly evil and Jesus returns, followed by the rapture, in which the saints ascend to heaven with him. Seven years later Christ ends the tribulation period, and establishes his Kingdom on earth – the Millennium.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, they would be not only Premillennialists, but also, Pre-tribulation.<sup>5</sup> The second interpretation, Historic Premillennialism, places the rapture after the tribulation period<sup>6</sup> and notes that the coming of Jesus will be preceded by recognizable signs, such as apostasy, famine, wars, and the presence of the Antichrist.<sup>7</sup> Besides these differences, however, both agree that “after the battle of Armageddon Christ establishes a world-wide Kingdom with Jerusalem as its capital, in which He and the resurrected and transfigured saints rule for a thousand years in righteousness, peace and prosperity.”<sup>8</sup>

The Postmillennial view, in contrast to Premillennialism, states that, through the preaching of the Gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit, the kingdom of God will be an extension of the world.<sup>9</sup> After that, the world will be progressively Christianized and Christian values and beliefs will be viewed as the standard, sin will be substantially reduced, and Christ’s second coming will close a long period of peace and righteousness called the Millennium.<sup>10</sup>

Amillennialism represents a wide range of alternate readings of Revelation that agree in looking for a figurative rather than literal fulfillment of the thousand years. Amillennialism

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<sup>3</sup> CTCR, “The End Times, a Study on Eschatology and Millennialism,” 1989, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium* (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1957), 17.

<sup>5</sup> Boettner, *The Millennium*, 141.

<sup>6</sup> Boettner, *The Millennium*, 141.

<sup>7</sup> Boettner, *The Millennium*, 143.

<sup>8</sup> Boettner, *The Millennium*, 142.

<sup>9</sup> Boettner, *The Millennium*, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Clouse, *The Meaning*, 8.

agrees with Postmillennialism that Christ's return is not political but spiritual, and will be followed by the resurrection and the final judgement.<sup>11</sup> Yet within that agreement there is great variety: some amillennialists relate the thousand years to the entire Christian era, others to a particular period of time within that era, while still others believe it should be understood as an "intermediate state."<sup>12</sup> According to the Augsburg Confession, article XVII, Lutherans have generally understood that the Millennium started after Christ's ascension and that he will return for the final Judgement, at which point he will raise all the dead.<sup>13</sup>

Robert Clouse explains in his book *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* how these interpretations became in evidence according to the historical period that society was living. His analysis goes back to the first century, when it seems that the Premillennial view was the most accepted interpretation. The Church historian Philip Schaff named "Barnabas, Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Methodius, and Lactantius" as some of the teachers of the Early Church who adopted a millenarian position, also called Chiliasm in this time period.<sup>14</sup> Barnabas might have been the first to teach the Premillennial view of the coming of Christ, but it was Papias who put "into the mouth of Christ himself a highly figurative description of the more than tropical fertility of that period,"<sup>15</sup> which thoughts were preserved and approved by Irenaeus. Schaff calls Tertullian an "enthusiastic Chiliast"<sup>16</sup> who supported his views with the predictions of the Montanist prophets in addition to the Apocalypse.

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<sup>11</sup> Boettner, *The Millennium*, 17.

<sup>12</sup> Boettner, *The Millennium*, 17.

<sup>13</sup> CTCR, 7.

<sup>14</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* 2, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1882), 546.

<sup>15</sup> Schaff, *History of the Christian*, 547.

<sup>16</sup> Schaff, *History of the Christian*, 548.

The medieval church saw a wide variety of millennial and apocalyptic movements. But it was the Reformation and the turmoil that accompanied it that brought apocalyptic thinking to the forefront of the church once again.<sup>17</sup> The Anabaptist takeover of Münster in Westphalia is a good example. It began with the arrival of some Anabaptist preachers in 1533.<sup>18</sup> In February 1534, they expelled all of the “godless” people from the city, and by the end of the month Münster had only nine thousand people living in it, about half of its former population.<sup>19</sup> The remaining occupants of the city were certain that they were near the end of the world and the second coming of Jesus, when he would start a thousand-year reign on earth, which corresponds to the view labeled as Premillennial.<sup>20</sup> In April, the young John of Leiden took over the position of leader of the movement, and by December, a man called Johann Duseschur said he had a vision given by God that John of Leiden was not a prophet but rather the new David that had returned to be their king.<sup>21</sup> After all that, John proclaimed himself the Messiah, which represented something truly novel and shifted the movement toward what would be called Messianism.<sup>22</sup> A new state was created, their New Jerusalem, that required everyone to be a believer and to live in a primitive communist system. It was a theocratic regime with new commandments.<sup>23</sup> On June 29, 1535, the authorities entered the city after a siege, and the “Münsterite Reformation” was over. The “king” John of Leiden and two other leaders were

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<sup>17</sup> Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 252.

<sup>18</sup> Irvin Buckwalter Horst, *The Radical Brethren: Anabaptism and the English Reformation to 1558* (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1972), 67.

<sup>19</sup> Anthony Arthur, *The Tailor-King: The Rise and Fall of the Anabaptist Kingdom of Münster* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 1999), 57.

<sup>20</sup> Arthur, *The Tailor-King*, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Arthur, *The Tailor-King*, 109.

<sup>22</sup> Wilson D. Wallis, *Messiahs, Their Role in Civilization* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Public Affairs, 1943), 57.

<sup>23</sup> Horst, *The Radical Brethren*, 71.

locked in three human-size cages and killed at the Market Square in Münster in January 1536.<sup>24</sup>

According to Clouse, the Münster event confirmed the Magisterial Reformers' suspicions of millennialism and confirmed them in the amillennial position, which had been defended by Augustine and received from the medieval church.<sup>25</sup> In *The City of God*, Augustine admitted that he once held a Premillennialist position, but his objection to it was that "the joys of the Saints during the Sabbath" were to be spiritual instead of worldly as some had argued.<sup>26</sup> His interpretation of the thousand years was that the thousand years is "an equivalent for the whole duration of this world, employing the number of perfection to mark the fullness of time."<sup>27</sup> Although some modern authors place Augustine in the postmillennial camp,<sup>28</sup> Walvoord argues that he "is better classified as an amillenarian inasmuch as his view amounts to a denial that there will be any literal millennium on earth."<sup>29</sup> The Reformers, like the medieval theologians before them, held Augustine in high esteem, and based on their reading of Scripture sided with his amillennial interpretation. This decision was affirmed when the events at Münster confirmed their suspicions of apocalyptic thinking more radical than their own. Ever since, the Reformation churches have favored Amillennialism over other interpretations.

### Messiahs: Muslims, Jews, and Christians

Since millennialism is not exclusive to one specific religion, it is interesting to comprehend how the element of the Messiah is represented among other monotheistic religions. Many authors

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<sup>24</sup> Arthur, *The Tailor-King*, 176.

<sup>25</sup> Clouse, *The Meaning*, 10.

<sup>26</sup> Augustine (Bishop of Hippo), *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods, 2 vols. (T. & T. Clark, 1871), 608.

<sup>27</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, 609.

<sup>28</sup> Boettner, *The Millennium*, 10.

<sup>29</sup> John Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Michigan: Zondervan, 1959), 19.

refer to Persian Zoroastrianism as the origin of the millenarian tradition.<sup>30</sup> Its leader, Zoroaster (probably before 6th century BC), believed that the end of world was near, and the final battle between good (Ormazd), and evil (Ahriman) would occur, which Ormazd would win and begin an eternal reign. Zoroaster also believed that he would witness this end and the new beginning during his lifetime. Clearly it did not happen, and the new Kingdom was deferred. Almost three thousand years after his death, his followers are still waiting for the “final redemption.”<sup>31</sup>

Today the three major monotheistic religions are Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. Although they have common aspects, they hold very different understandings of an expected deliverer. According to Sachedina, while “Muslims conceive of a person who will “appear” (*zuhur*) or “rise” (*qiyam*) against existing intolerable secular authority,” Jews expect “one who is yet to come,”<sup>32</sup> and Christians foresee the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, who already came and promised his return.

In the Islamic context, the deliverer or the Mahdi, is expected to bring a social transformation and to restore the Islamic faith making it the norm for all nations.<sup>33</sup> However, there are some disagreement around the idea of the Mahdi. The word al-Mahdi is not mentioned in the Koran,<sup>34</sup> and there is no reference of an expected messianic figure,<sup>35</sup> yet the belief was kept alive by the community.<sup>36</sup> This subject of the Mahdi is complex, contested, and is presented with

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<sup>30</sup> Yonina Talmon, “Millenarian Movements,” *European Journal of Sociology* 7 (1966): 158; Wessinger, Catherine, *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 10.

<sup>31</sup> Talmon, “Millenarian Movements,” 159.

<sup>32</sup> Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of Mahdī in Twelver Shi‘ism* (Albany: State University of New York, 1981), 2.

<sup>33</sup> Sachedina, *Islamic Messianism*, 2.

<sup>34</sup> Jan-Olaf Blichfeldt, *Early Mahdism: Politics and Religion in the Formative Period of Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985), 5.

<sup>35</sup> Hayrettin Yücesoy, *Messianic Beliefs and Imperial Politics in Medieval Islam: the ‘Abbāsid Caliphate in the Early Ninth Century* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 38.

<sup>36</sup> About the distinctions in the prophecies according to the Mahdi, or Messiah, and its variations, see:

several interpretations in the Islamic tradition.<sup>37</sup> According to Yücesoy, as early as the seventh century the idea about the return of Isa ibn Maryam—the biblical Jesus, seemed to have been a common belief among a group of Muslims.<sup>38</sup> Jewish messianism is similarly varied.<sup>39</sup> Wallis identifies three different types of messianism within the larger Jewish tradition. The first, is centered around the king and the nation, hoping for a national future under the glorious house of David. The second is apocalyptic and, more often than not, catastrophic. It awaits the establishment of the kingdom of Israel by a divine warrior who will defeat the heathen. Finally, the last type of messianism is “ethical, spiritual, and universal,” and portrays an ideal state based in love and service, in which the will of Yahweh is accomplished.<sup>40</sup> To Norman Cohn, the Messiah expected by the Jews under the Roman Empire was a “warrior-king” with “unique,” miracle power, basically a superhuman, emphasizing his political and earthly aspects.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, the idea of a spiritual king and a spiritual kingdom was not very accepted by the Jews.<sup>42</sup>

Christianity, unlike Judaism and Islam, focuses on a Messiah, Jesus, who has already come and has promised to return for judgment at the end of the world. The hope of Jesus’ second coming is based on the references of his return from the Apostle Paul’s letters, as well as his own

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Blichfeldt, *Early Mahdism*, 3; Yücesoy, *Messianic Beliefs*, 42. The interpretations have different understandings of how the character of the Mahdi would be presented, some groups held that he already came and could be connected to some of the caliphs. See Blichfeldt, *Early Mahdism*, 2

<sup>37</sup> Blichfeldt, *Early Mahdism*, 2.

<sup>38</sup> Yücesoy, *Messianic Beliefs*, 39.

<sup>39</sup> Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in Jewish Myth and Messianism*, trans. Batya Stein (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 93.

<sup>40</sup> Wallis, *Messiahs, Their Role*, 14

<sup>41</sup> Cohn, *The Pursuit*, 22.

<sup>42</sup> Cohn, *The Pursuit*, 23. See also Talmon, “Millenarian Movements,” 161. Talmon explains the different types of messianism by referring to the historical period in which they arose, concluding that it is not until the Roman Empire and the oppression suffered by the Jews under the Romans, that a political savior started to be expected.

words found in the Gospels: “They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Mathew 24:30 ESV); and the passage that he says that he will prepare a place and come back: “I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:3 ESV). These verses are straightforward about the Messiah’s second coming; to the majority of Christians there is no doubt that Jesus Christ himself will be returning to the world when the time comes.

### **Catastrophic and Progressive Millennialism**

As seen before, the theological meaning of the Millennium refers to a period of a thousand years—be it literal or symbolic—in which the Messiah reigns among God’s people. Differing interpretations among theologians did not change the connection between millennialism and the coming of Jesus Christ; the millennium was a fundamentally Christian idea. Over time, however, historians of religion, sociologists, and anthropologists modified the understanding of what was “millennial,” applying it to a broader group of movements, both Christian and non-Christian,<sup>43</sup> and transforming the theological concept into a historical one. According to Norman Cohn, millennialism has “become simply a convenient label for a particular type of salvationism.”<sup>44</sup> Catherine Wessinger agrees that this terminology refers to “the perfect age or God’s kingdom in which there will be a collective salvation.”<sup>45</sup> In addition, she states that it “may be applied figuratively to any conception of a perfect age to come, or of a perfect land to be made accessible.”<sup>46</sup> Regardless, the idea behind the terminology as used by anthropologists and

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<sup>43</sup> Cohn, *The Pursuit*, 15; George D. Chryssides, and Benjamin E. Zeller, eds., *The Bloomsbury Companion to New Religious Movements* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 135.

<sup>44</sup> Cohn, *The Pursuit*, 15.

<sup>45</sup> Catherine Wessinger, ed., *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence: Historical Cases* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 7.

<sup>46</sup> Sylvia Thrupp, ed., *Millennial Dreams in Action* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), 12.

sociologists is no longer connected with the traditional theological sense but has become a much wider concept.

In the late 1990s, Wessinger formulated a new terminology, moving further away from eschatological nomenclatures that, according to her, were no longer communicating about millennialism and, consequently, misleading readers. Her suggestion was to discontinue the terms Premillennialism and Postmillennialism<sup>47</sup> and to adopt, respectively, *Catastrophic Millennialism* and *Progressive Millennialism*. This new terminology was intended to reveal the differing expectations inherent in various millennial outlooks—one more pessimistic and the other more optimistic—and to dissociate them from theological meanings. Each of the terms was related to how a group manifested its beliefs and expectations of what was going to come next.

According to Wessinger, the form of millennialism most studied is the one that sees humanity, society, and history pessimistically. In this form, millennialists believe that things will get worse as time moves forward and that evil, along with the world as it exists today, will have to be eliminated. Only then will the new creation be possible and truly good. Since this pattern is not exclusive to Christianity, the author suggests the term “catastrophic millennialism” to classify this type of millennialism, and suggests its application to other movements with similar characteristics.<sup>48</sup>

The other category of millennialism identified by Wessinger is “progressive millennialism.” Movements that fall into this category are characterized by the belief that things will get better, even if it is necessary to create conflicts, that is, to participate in revolutionary

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<sup>47</sup> Wessinger, “Millennialism with and without,” 51.

<sup>48</sup> Wessinger, “Millennialism with and without,” 49.



violence.<sup>49</sup> Progressive millennialism might also include an intensification of beliefs in prosperity, progressive evolution, and harmony among humans working together. These beliefs especially characterized such movements in the nineteenth century.<sup>50</sup>

Catastrophic and progressive millennialism are not mutually exclusive. There are cases, for example, the Jehovah's Witnesses, in which a group starts as catastrophic and, through the years, inclines toward the progressive.<sup>51</sup> Some movements may even shift back and forth between the two expectations.<sup>52</sup> Nor do these new manifestations of millennialism necessarily rely strongly on belief in the divine but instead have a "superhuman" agent occupying the functions performed by God in more traditional schemes. There is even an atheistic form of millennialism. This type is recognizable in Nazism with its superhuman Aryan race, as well as in the Maoist conception of "consciousness" and the attendant stimulation of the people toward "heroic efforts to create the communist state."<sup>53</sup> Talmon offers a succinct view of such groups when he defines millenarianism as a religious movement that expects "imminent, total, ultimate, this-worldly collective salvation."<sup>54</sup> Often such movements attempt to improve the problematic world, and this can lead to messianism.<sup>55</sup>

### **Messianism**

In addition to the categories noted above, scholars have also distinguished between

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<sup>49</sup> Wessinger, *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence*, 10.

<sup>50</sup> Wessinger, "Millennialism with and without," 51.

<sup>51</sup> Wessinger, *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence*, 52.

<sup>52</sup> Wessinger, *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence*, 8.

<sup>53</sup> Wessinger, *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence*, 9–10.

<sup>54</sup> Talmon, "Millenarian Movements," 158.

<sup>55</sup> Luiz A. Solano Rossi, "O Messianismo e a Construção do Paraíso na História," *Revista Aulas 4* (2007), 3.

“millenarian” movements and “messianic” movements. According to Anthony Wallace, the millenarian movements emphasize an apocalyptic change in the world, which transformation is engineered by the supernatural.<sup>56</sup> Messianic movements, on the other hand, emphasize the involvement of a “divine savior” in human flesh as the agent of transformation.<sup>57</sup> Queiroz observes that, although British and French scholars often use millennialism and messianism as synonyms, the distinction between the two types of movements ought to be observed, since the subject of the millennium is much broader and not reduced to just the one feature of a human savior. Therefore, she categorizes messianism as a sub-division of millenarianism. Wessinger, in her analysis of Annie Besant, defined messianism as a “characteristic of most but not all pre-millenarian movements,” meaning that a movement can be millennial without being messianic, but not the other way around. Thus, Canudos can be called a “messianic-millenarian movement.”<sup>58</sup>

Queiroz further distinguishes between messianism and a messianic movement. Messianism is the term she uses to identify the people’s longings during their wait for the messiah. A messianic movement refers to group activity under the direction of a leader, or even the messiah himself or herself, to accelerate the millennium.<sup>59</sup> In her studies she identified a group of similarities between several Brazilian messianic communities, Canudos among them. The first similarity is the structure, which has the messianic figure as central to the community. This leader is the one who will promote and control the group in all aspects, only to him is reserved

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<sup>56</sup> Anthony F. C. Wallace, “Revitalization Movements,” in *Sacred Realms: Readings in the Anthropology of Religion*, ed. Richard Warns, James Garber, and R. Jon McGee (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 390–91.

<sup>57</sup> Wallace, “Revitalization Movements,” 390–91.

<sup>58</sup> Renato da Silva Queiroz, “Mobilizações Socioreligiosas no Brasil: os Surtos Messiânico-Milenaristas,” *Revista USP*, no. 67 (September/November 2005): 137.

<sup>59</sup> Queiroz, *O Messianismo*, 24.

the power to make all the decisions. The second similarity is the idea of the myth, which means, the belief that it is possible to inaugurate a perfect society on earth, without injustice, pain, diseases, and death. Besides the belief in a perfect society, the community awaits the return of the divine figure that will inaugurate the perfect society on earth. The final similarity is the intended purpose of the community, which is to create solutions for the social crises present in society.<sup>60</sup>

Some authors identified Canudos as messianic and millennial due to its Sebastianic influence. Sebastianism was the belief that the young king Sebastian of Portugal, who died in 1578 at North Africa during the battle of Alcácer Quibir would return to take over the kingdom which had fallen onto the hands of king Phillip II of Spain.<sup>61</sup> Many Brazilian movements could be categorized under the influence of the Sebastianic belief, and it is known that Antônio Conselheiro spoke of the God-given right of the royal family until the end; however, by the year of 1893, when Conselheiro and his followers started the settlement itself, there is no record that Sebastianism was still present in their belief.

The development of a messianic-millennarian movement depends on a set of preconditions. According to Talmon's analysis, even though messianism can be propagated in prosperous and growing communities,<sup>62</sup> minorities coming from lower strata, who have been oppressed and perhaps even persecuted, tend to be the best candidates to initiate or follow such movements.<sup>63</sup> Their social isolation is another indicative of their need to disrupt any connection with traditional

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<sup>60</sup> Queiroz, *O Messianismo*, 329–330.

<sup>61</sup> Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz, "D. Sebastião no Brasil," *Revista USP*, no. 20 (1994): 32.

<sup>62</sup> Talmon, "Millenarian Movements," 190.

<sup>63</sup> Talmon, "Millenarian Movements," 181.

groups.<sup>64</sup> They usually emerge during periods of transition,<sup>65</sup> or crises, due to changes in the social structure or organization.<sup>66</sup> Cohn's observation regarding this last aspect in his analysis of medieval movements was that the people were living in "a state of chronic and inescapable insecurity, harassed not only by their economic helplessness and vulnerability but by the lack of the traditional social relationships" on which the lower social strata had been able to depend on, even at the worst moments.<sup>67</sup> In the case of Canudos, this precondition was related to the Proclamation of the Republic in 1899. Wallis highlighted three features related to the usual preconditions for messianic manifestations manifested in Canudos, namely "a social need, a prevalent messianic concept, and a responsive individual."<sup>68</sup> He concluded that society must go under a period of extreme pressure and stress to be in the perfect condition for a prophet or messiah to start a movement promising an earthly or heavenly reward.

The figure of the messiah or prophet is an essential feature to a millennial and messianic movement. The distinction between the two, however, can be very important to some authors. According to Worth, while the prophet is a religious leader, the messiah will elevate himself to a position where he is the main authority and where he will become the center of the movement for his followers. Therefore, a messiah only owns the title when a certain number of people recognize him as such.<sup>69</sup> In Desroche's characterization of the prophet and messiah, the prophet is seen as being responsible for a specific mission given by God or another supernatural agent. Therefore, the prophet's power is not within himself but only in connection with this mission. In

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<sup>64</sup> Talmon, "Millenarian Movements," 183.

<sup>65</sup> Talmon, "Millenarian Movements," 184.

<sup>66</sup> Queiroz, *O Messianismo*, 331.

<sup>67</sup> Cohn, *The Pursuit*, 87-88.

<sup>68</sup> Wallis, *Messiahs, Their Role*, 187.

<sup>69</sup> Queiroz, *O Messianismo*, 15.

contrast to the prophet, the messiah was not merely chosen by God or a supernatural agent but was “united to him through a natural/paternal”<sup>70</sup> connection, becoming the central figure in the community and much more important than the prophet. As a result, a prophet is not necessarily a messiah, but a messiah is always a prophet.<sup>71</sup> Talmon highlights the fact that in some cases, besides the messiah and the prophet, there is the figure of a leader (or leaders) that may act as a forerunner of the messiah, while in other cases, the same person executes all three roles.<sup>72</sup> According to Wallis’ studies, during the first fifteen centuries of Christianity there was no record of a person claiming to be Jesus Christ or his reincarnation.<sup>73</sup> This changed after the turmoil of the Reformation, as has already been noted here.

In addition to the ability to speak to an unseen source—God or another unknown power, charism is an important feature of both, messiah and prophet, to bring people to listen to their revelations. It establishes the relationship between the leader as the charismatic authority and his followers. In some situations, as Dawson explains, this charismatic authority does not “seem to fit the popular stereotype,”<sup>74</sup> and an outsider would have a difficult time trying to find the “amazing” leader that the followers see. At the community of Canudos, Antônio Conselheiro is this powerful leader. Yet many sources from that time describe nothing special about him, and he was even considered a lunatic by society in general.

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<sup>70</sup> Henri Desroche, *Dieux d'hommes: Dictionnaire des Messianismes et Millénarismes de l'ère Chrétienne* (Paris: Mouton, 1969), 7.

<sup>71</sup> Wessinger, *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence*, 11.

<sup>72</sup> Talmon, “Millenarian Movements,” 169.

<sup>73</sup> Wallis, *Messiahs, Their Role*, 57.

<sup>74</sup> Lorne L. Dawson, “Charismatic leadership in Millennial Movements,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 125.

### Canudos: Fear as a Significant Feature

The community of Canudos, called Belo Monte by Antônio Conselheiro, has features that lead one, with no doubt, to the conclusion that it was a millenarian and messianic movement. The change to the Republican system did not make the conservatives happy. Conselheiro believed that to live in isolation was the best option to stay away from the threat this new system represented.

The context of Canudos represents the lives of many of the backlanders. They were used to a life of misery and exploitation, but their hopes were always renewed with the help of the Catholic church, especially its practice of charity and promises of divine assistance and an eternal and happy afterlife.<sup>75</sup> The situation changed when Catholicism suffered the consequences of the political debates, and the new ideas about the Republican system started to be put into practice. This new routine, the lack of help from their once-trusted patrons, and the reintroduction of an old doctrine in a more appealing form are some of the aspects noted by Cohn regarding the medieval messianic movements that also appear in Canudos.<sup>76</sup>

Distinguishing between types of millennial movements, as Wessinger has, helps greatly in understanding the events of Canudos. She suggests three groups with specific characteristics: “*assaulted millennial groups* that are assaulted because they are perceived by outsiders to be dangerous; *fragile millennial groups* that initiate violence to preserve their religious goal; and *revolutionary millennial movements* possessing ideologies, or theologies that legitimate violence.”<sup>77</sup> In her description, the categories can be interchangeable, which means that a given

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<sup>75</sup> Patricia R. Pessar, *From Fanatics to Folk: Brazilian Millenarianism and Popular Culture* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 28.

<sup>76</sup> Cohn, *The Pursuit*, 87–88.

<sup>77</sup> Wessinger, *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence*, 3–4 (italics mine).

movement may fit in two categories at the same time or change from one to another. The community of Canudos belongs to the *assaulted* category, but also, at some moments, to the *revolutionary* one. Through the letters written to and from Jeremoabo's baron, it is possible to understand the fear that surrounded the population because of Canudos. Sampaio speaks of a "medo construído,"<sup>78</sup> a fabricated fear, meaning a type of fear that was motivated not only by the Military but by the Catholic church and the local political parties as well with the help of the newspapers to disseminate the idea among the population.<sup>79</sup> As a result, Canudos was feared by the society and by law enforcement. The members of the Canudos community were misunderstood and "not viewed as holding to valid religions worthy of respect."<sup>80</sup> "Fanatic" and "lunatic" were words commonly used to describe Antônio Conselheiro, and they were also applied to his followers.

Canudos also conforms to the typology of a millennial group in that it was devoted to a source of authority that surpasses civil authority.<sup>81</sup> Antônio Conselheiro's statements against the Republic makes it clear that he believed his devotion to God annulled any obligation of obedience to the government, or at least, to the one he considered the Devil's representative. For this reason, confrontation with the local authorities was understood as a consequence of the community's loyalty to God, which gave them the confidence needed to stay strong until the very end. This confidence describes many assaulted groups' belief even decades later, in which persecution works as an assurance of the final reward that will be provided by God.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Sampaio, *Canudos: Cartas*, 32.

<sup>79</sup> Sampaio, *Canudos: Cartas*, 68.

<sup>80</sup> Wessinger, *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence*, 17.

<sup>81</sup> Wessinger, *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence*, 24.

<sup>82</sup> Wessinger, *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence*, 17.

The idea of the *medo construído* is related to the attempt to show society that a millennial group is not worthy of empathy or compassion, as the newspapers did. By doing that they created a demonized and dehumanized image of the believers, which results in an intensification of the conflict.<sup>83</sup> Public opinion did not demonstrate signs of sympathy because they did not identify those people as fellow citizens or even as part of humankind. After the war the academics started to realize the brutality faced at the Belo Monte and understood that the freedom proposed by the Republic was not a recognized right for everyone.

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<sup>83</sup> Wessinger, *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence*, 39.



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE NOTEBOOK**

Most scholars who have studied the movement of Canudos over the years have viewed the religious elements as little more than ancillary to what they see as the more fundamental concerns of economics and politics. This is especially true when they discuss the tragic events of the community's commotion and its suppression by the government. In this study, I have placed the religious life and belief of the community at the center of its existence as the foundation of everything its members thought and did. Centering religious belief and life in this way offers a better explanation of the community's reaction to contemporary events and to the government than economic or political considerations alone.

#### **The Religiosity of the Backland**

At the end of the nineteenth century, the Catholic church was for all practical purposes the only church present in Northeast Region, Brazil. By the time Canudos became a settlement, the separation between church and state was only a couple of years old. The backlanders still lived according to Catholic ideals, making the associated mores, such as the desire for the wellbeing of all and the idea that the strong would take care of the weak, functionally equivalent to the laws of their society.<sup>1</sup> According to Roger Bastide, in that isolated part of the country the figure of the prophet replaced the priest. The people valued the ascetic life and tended to follow those who chose to live that kind of life.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Otten, "Só Deus é Grande," 13.

<sup>2</sup> Roger Bastide, *Brasil: Terra de Contrastes*, trans. Maria Isaura P. de Queiroz (São Paulo: Difusão Europeia

Throughout Brazil at this time, Christians had developed conceptions and images of God that varied from each other and from traditional Christianity. The true God, as Alexandre Otten explains, had been hidden behind the saints and was no longer accessible to the people, which resulted in the creation of what he calls “new types of God.”<sup>3</sup> Among the backlanders, one new type of God was “God the Boss.” This conception of God, based on the image of the landlords who owned everything the backlanders could see, appeared as the authoritarian boss requiring obedience and submission. Another new type was “God the Creator,” but a creator who left the world to the saints or/and demons, not caring much for human beings. “God the Judge” emerged during difficult times when the end of times was feared, and this God required reparation for all the wrongs one could have done. These different types of God created a distant God, which resulted in fatalism, passivity, and submission.<sup>4</sup>

Yet in the few moments that people felt God was not neglecting them but caring for them, another type of God emerged—“God the Godfather.” An example of moments when the poor were not neglected were the various rituals and traditions adopted by folk Catholicism in Brazil, such as the *festas*. These were festivals organized by the wealthy for the poor to celebrate a particular saint. This practice was one aspect of the godfather system that was very important to the culture of the backland. The system, a form of co-parentage in which the godparents became responsible for the infants, worked to strengthen relationships, making those involved part of the same family.<sup>5</sup> It is known that Antônio Conselheiro, from 1880 through 1892, was godfather to ninety-two children in the town of Itapicuru.<sup>6</sup> Some parents would invite important patrons as

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do Livro, 1964), 84–85.

<sup>3</sup> Otten, “Só Deus é Grande,” 12.

<sup>4</sup> Otten, “Só Deus é Grande,” 12.

<sup>5</sup> Levine, *Vale of Tears*, 137.

<sup>6</sup> Alexandre Otten, *Só Deus é Grande: a Mensagem Religiosa de Antônio Conselheiro* (São Paulo: Edições

godparents of their children with the hope that they would be well supported in case of need. Therefore, God was not distant anymore, but as “God the Godfather” rose up to protect and advocate for the poor.

Amidst other attempts to reform or transcend these ideas of God, Antônio Conselheiro preached a protecting God and Jesus as the just advocate of the poor. This gave his followers a new identity and turned his itinerant preaching into a religious movement.<sup>7</sup> As a result, one can argue that Conselheiro’s spirituality was the main element of the movement seen in Canudos.<sup>8</sup> His followers believed he was God’s prophet, Jesus’ servant and imitator, and a pilgrim on his way to the Celestial Home.<sup>9</sup> The characteristic label “religious fanatic” given to Antônio Conselheiro may be a consequence of his ascetic life, whose rigors were foreign to most of the people from the coast but quite common in the backland—a place where many had a simple life.

Nogueira argues, in fact, that Antônio Conselheiro was in no way a fanatic and that the fanaticism present in the community of Canudos, if one could even call it that, was not religious, but emotional. The author insists that the fanatic feeling came from the followers towards the figure of their leader, something common, or even expected, since he was their guide.<sup>10</sup> They called him *Good Jesus*,<sup>11</sup> *My Father*,<sup>12</sup> *Good Jesus Conselheiro*, *Santo Antônio Aparecido*,<sup>13</sup> and

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Loyola, 1990), 155.

<sup>7</sup> Otten, “Só Deus é Grande,” 14.

<sup>8</sup> Otten, “Só Deus é Grande,” 21.

<sup>9</sup> Otten, “Só Deus é Grande,” 39.

<sup>10</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 37.

<sup>11</sup> Otten, “Só Deus é Grande,” 21.

<sup>12</sup> Otten, *Só Deus*, 156; Benicio, *O Rei*, 67.

<sup>13</sup> A reference to Our Lady of Aparecida—a title of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and Saint Anthony. Queiroz, *O Messianismo*, 206.

so on, yet, Conselheiro kept calling all of them “brothers and sisters.”<sup>14</sup> Even though some people considered him a messiah, he did not claim to be and kept describing himself as an emissary of God with the mission to speak God’s word.<sup>15</sup> In fact, in his notebook—a manuscript with sermons and notes that was found after the war, Conselheiro did not identify himself as a messenger, or Christ himself; he simply chose the word “peregrino,” a pilgrim, and used this title in a very humble manner as is seen on his farewell:

Goodbye people, goodbye birds, goodbye trees, goodbye land, accept my farewell that shows the grateful memories I have of you, which will never fade from the memory of this *peregrino*, who hopes eagerly for your salvation and the wellbeing of the Church.<sup>16</sup>

The same word is used by the survivors of the war to speak of Antônio Conselheiro. Nertan Macedo interviewed Honório Vilanova in 1962 at Assaré, Ceará. Vilanova was one of the last survivors that had lived in Canudos near Antônio Conselheiro. At the age of 97, he remembered the first time he saw Conselheiro:

I met the *Peregrino* when I was a little boy at Urucu. If I remember correctly, it was 1873, before the big drought. He [Conselheiro] arrived one day at the farm, asking for charity to share among the poor, as he used to do. [ . . . ]

Years later, we [Honório, and his brother Antônio Vilanova] met the *Peregrino* again, now at Bahia. The people of Vila Nova da Rainha, where I used to live with my family, spoke of him [Conselheiro] as a prophet-saint.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Otten, *Só Deus*, 156.

<sup>15</sup> Benício, *O Rei*, 41.

<sup>16</sup> “Adeus povo, adeus aves, adeus árvores, adeus campos, aceitai a minha despedida, que bem demonstra as gratas recordações que levo de vós, que jamais se apagarão da lembrança deste peregrino, que aspira ansiosamente a vossa salvação e o bem ad Igreja.” Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 182 (628), author’s own translation.

<sup>17</sup> “Conheci o Peregrino, quando eu era menino, no Urucu. Se bem me recordo, foi em 1873, antes da grande seca[sic]. Ele[sic] chegou, um dia, na fazenda, pedindo esmolas para distribuir aos pobres, como era de seu costume. [ . . . ] Anos passados, reencontramos o Peregrino, desta feita na Bahia. O povo de Vila Nova da Rainha, onde então residia com os meus, dêle[sic] falava como de um santo profeta.” Macedo, *Memorial de Vilanova*, 37, author’s own translation.

The testimony above helps to clarify how other people referred to Antônio Conselheiro. They respected him, and more than that, they identified him as a prophet and a holy man.

### Sources

Antônio Conselheiro, according to Da Cunha, always carried a bag with paper, a quill pen, ink, and two books that were common among the Portuguese missionaries overseas: *Horas Marianas*, and *Missão Abreviada*.<sup>18</sup> The first is a devotional for lay-people written by Friar José Ignacio Roquette, frequently used in Brazil and Portugal. It contains, among other things, a calendar for every day of the year with the saint or martyr of each day, prayers for many occasions, a table of sins, explanations about the Mass, the Lord's Prayer, and the Hail Mary. The book also prescribes indulgences, for example, every person who prays the Office of the Virgin Mary has, for each hour, forty days of indulgence.<sup>19</sup> The second book, *Missão Abreviada*, was written by Father José Manuel Gonçalves Couto, and it was especially used for public prayers.<sup>20</sup> It is mostly meditations or reflections on topics related to the Christian faith and life. It also contains a brief life of twenty-one saints of the Catholic church. Some authors have accused Couto's book of Jansenism, pointing to his emphasis on an ascetic life according to medieval norms, and of "mystical terrorism,"<sup>21</sup> highlighting his "threat upon threat of eternal damnation and fiery perdition."<sup>22</sup>

Antônio's sermons were based on these two books, the Holy Scriptures, and probably

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<sup>18</sup> Da Cunha, *Obras Completas*, chap. 2, Kindle.

<sup>19</sup> J. Ignacio Roquette, *Novas Horas Marianas ou Officio Menor da S.S. Virgem Maria Nossa Senhora* (Paris: Guillard, Aillaud & Cia, 1885), 405.

<sup>20</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 29.

<sup>21</sup> Macedo, *Memorial de Vilanova*, 50; 58. See also: José Maria de Oliveira Silva, "Guerra de Canudos – As Prédicas em debate," *Projeto História*, no. 30 (June 2005): 270.

<sup>22</sup> Levine, *Vale of Tears*, 194.

another theological book about the Commandments.<sup>23</sup> Because of his good education, Conselheiro was able to use Latin quotations from the Bible.<sup>24</sup> Reading the guidelines given at the beginning of the *Missão Abreviada*, one realizes that Conselheiro's preaching was not an attempt to take the place of the priests or to show how influential he was but to follow the directions that said missionaries should be present in every village. If it was not possible for a priest to be present, the book prescribed that "any man or woman who knows how to read well and has an honorable life" should do it.<sup>25</sup> Antônio Conselheiro believed he was called to this—he was a follower of Christ who had to remind the people that there was no one more powerful than God.

Through the imitation of Jesus, who was poor and humiliated, Conselheiro was able to connect with people who experienced poverty and humiliation every day in their lives. By pointing out the damage that sin does, not only to the soul but also to the relationships and welfare of the community, he committed himself to go farther than proclaiming salvation for the soul; he wanted a community of holy souls and holy bodies. Therefore, he wanted a "holy church" on earth.<sup>26</sup>

### The Notebook

The last days of Canudos were terrible. Many people, both soldiers and *conselheiristas*, suffered from a strain of smallpox. The smell of unclean and dead bodies was repugnant, as

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<sup>23</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 29.

<sup>24</sup> Beginning in 1757, the Catholic church allowed the reading of the Bible in any language, if the translations had been previously approved by the church. In 1790, Father Antônio Pereira de Figueiredo finished the first Catholic translation of the Scriptures from the Latin (Vulgate) to Portuguese. Luiz Antonio Giraldo, *História da Bíblia no Brasil* (São Paulo: Sociedade Bíblica do Brasil, 2008), 32, 36.

<sup>25</sup> Manuel José Gonçalves Couto, *Missão Abreviada para Despertar os Descuidados, Converter os Peccadores e Sustentar o Fructo das Missões* (Porto: Typographia de Sebastião José Pereira, 1868), 7.

<sup>26</sup> Otten, "Só Deus é Grande," 31.

anyone would have expected, and the decision to burn everything was perhaps necessary. On October 5, medical student João de Souza Pondé, during the search of the Sanctuary, where Antônio Conselheiro's corpse was found, noticed an old wooden box that contained a bound book inside. Eyewitnesses testified that this was undoubtedly the book carried by Conselheiro with his notes and sermons.

João de Souza Pondé gave the book to his friend Afrânio Peixoto, who in turn gave it to Euclides da Cunha. Da Cunha wrote the most famous book about the war of Canudos, *Os Sertões*, yet he does not seem to have read Conselheiro's book that had been given to him. This neglect probably resulted from personal matters and ill health—he died a short time after receiving the book. Years later, Aristeu Seixas, a poet and the president of the Paulist Academy of Letters, found the book in a used bookstore. Nogueira transcribed Conselheiro's book and published it in 1974.<sup>27</sup>

On the title page, Antônio Conselheiro identified himself as the “*peregrino* at the village of Belo Monte, Bahia in January 12, 1897.”<sup>28</sup> With impeccable handwriting in bold, black ink, Conselheiro penned the six hundred and twenty-eight pages, each page with fourteen lines, of his sermons and notes. The notebook is divided into four sections and an appendix:<sup>29</sup>

1. Storms in Mary's heart. Mary's mysteries [in Jesus life]<sup>30</sup>
2. Exposition of the ten commandments
3. Selected texts (from the Scriptures)
4. Other issues

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<sup>27</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 23.

<sup>28</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 49.

<sup>29</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 22–23.

<sup>30</sup> Twenty-nine homilies divided in three paragraphs each.

- About the Republic

The first section dealing with Mary is the longest part of the book and demonstrates how the doctrine of the Catholic church was central to Conselheiro's teachings. Queiroz observes that the *jagunços* considered themselves excellent Catholics,<sup>31</sup> and their mother was none other than the Virgin Mary herself,<sup>32</sup> who protected them and advocated in their favor. In Conselheiro's written homilies, the predominant preaching style is the narrative, and the veneration of Mary is its subject. Even though Conselheiro never applies the title savior to Mary, he and his followers believed that she existed at a higher level—higher even than ordinary saints—and this allowed her to ask God for the forgiveness of sins of all people.<sup>33</sup>

The veneration of Mary is such that in one of the homilies Conselheiro writes that Mary did not have any part in the death of Christ, even though he suffered because of the sins of human beings. Jesus' death was not her responsibility, and they, Jesus and Mary, were both innocent.<sup>34</sup> Conselheiro contrasts Mary the "innocent mother" with Eve as the "criminal mother," and because of the criminal mother's children, the innocent son of the innocent mother had to die. In this sense, humankind owes a debt to the Virgin Mary as well as to Christ.<sup>35</sup> This innocent mother was also a figure to be imitated:

[. . .] we have learned from both [Jesus and Mary] to follow God's will, following his commandments: let's learn from Mary to sacrifice, for the glory of our Lord, whatever we have that we consider most precious in the entire world.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Queiroz, *O Messianismo*, 218.

<sup>32</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 62.

<sup>33</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 82.

<sup>34</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 71 (75), 86 (141, 143), 93 (175).

<sup>35</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 80 (114), 87 (150).

<sup>36</sup> "[. . .] aprendemos de ambos a cumprir a vontade de Deus, obedecendo aos seus mandamentos: aprendamos de Maria a sacrificar para maior glória do Senhor o que tivermos de mais estimável do mundo." Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 77 (100), author's own translation.



Mary appears as “co-redeemer”<sup>37</sup> and the veneration given her is so massive as to sometimes confuse her with the Godhead, which would be the case especially for the uneducated among Conselheiro’s followers. Nonetheless, Antônio Conselheiro acknowledges that salvation for sinners comes only through the sacrifice made by Jesus Christ, “who is the same as God.”<sup>38</sup>

In this first section of the handbook, Conselheiro’s use of narrative includes speaking of Mary’s sufferings, explaining how she felt and what she thought of Jesus throughout the years. The second section on the Ten Commandments lacks this sort of speculative narration. Instead, Conselheiro points out sin’s consequences in the lives of people and shows his listeners how sin affects relationships and the well-being of all. Following this is a third part containing a selection of Bible verses, which are given in Latin and Portuguese. The most quoted books are the Gospels of Matthew, with twenty verses among the seventy, followed by the Gospels of Luke and John; from the Old Testament, the most quoted are the books of Isaiah and Psalms. Almost a third of the verses refer to salvation through Jesus Christ. Towards the end of this section he has a homily on how to preserve the faith.<sup>39</sup> The fourth section briefly treats theological issues. Conselheiro explains the cross as a symbol and highlights three stages of law,<sup>40</sup> namely, the natural law given to Adam and Eve after creation, the written law given to Moses, and the law of grace fulfilled in Jesus Christ; the natural and the written law worked as tools to help people not to be led astray from the God and direct them to the law of grace.<sup>41</sup> He also writes about the Mass, confession, the construction of Solomon’s temple, and the dedication of their new temple at Canudos.

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<sup>37</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 86 (144).

<sup>38</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 59 (19).

<sup>39</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 152–157 (459–485).

<sup>40</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 162 (491–494).

<sup>41</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 116 (273–274).

Finally, the last part called “About the Republic,” speaks about the result of man’s incredulity, namely, the Republic, and the abomination of civil marriage. In addition, Conselheiro presents a defense of the imperial family’s “God given right” to Brazil, and of the abolition of slavery.

### **Important Aspects of Antônio Conselheiro’s Preaching**

Although most of the authorities and the landlords described Antônio Conselheiro as ignorant, this does not seem to have been the case. His writings reveal his familiarity with Scriptures, theological books and doctrine. Nor is it possible to say, based on his book, that he founded his theology only on the law or that people were following him out of fear and intimidation. The central message of his homilies is Jesus Christ, who is referred to as Our Lord Jesus Christ, “the true Savior and Redeemer of the world.”<sup>42</sup> The constant attempt to show his devotion to Jesus is what drove him to share Jesus’ example of suffering in his everyday life. In his homily about the fifth commandment, for example, he says that insults should be received always under the love that God has given us. If someone could not do that, then that person should seek the civil law, and the civil law would punish accordingly without the use of violence or any threat to life.<sup>43</sup>

While much more could be said about Antônio Conselheiro’s preaching, this analysis will highlight three topics, namely, (1) God the Father, who loves his children; (2) the clear understanding of who Jesus is, including his two natures; and (3) the promised salvation.

Knowing that most of the backlanders thought of God as distant from them, Antônio Conselheiro portrayed a God full of unwavering love for his children—a God who was no longer distant but willing to sacrifice his Son for the sake of men. Conselheiro emphasized the

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<sup>42</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 154 (469).

<sup>43</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 125 (326).

astonishing love of a God who gave his only Son in order to save “the slave.” At the beginning of his section on the Ten Commandments, he recognized that “in the old law one could have doubted if God loved each one with tenderness,” but after seeing Christ’s blood shed as a result of torture and death, no one could ever doubt God’s amazing love for humanity.<sup>44</sup> This does not mean that Conselheiro shared Marcion’s view of the Old Testament as the work of a different God. Rather he used the Old Testament apologetically and affirmed, several times, that God is a God of love, who had shown that love many times in history. His explanation of Genesis 6–8 provides a good example of this. Before the flood, God told Noah to warn the people to abandon their evil ways, but no one believed him. As a result, God sent the world-destroying flood. Nevertheless, Conselheiro treated the flood as a high point of God’s patience and mercy:

By this amazing example it is clear that God is, indeed, patient; but his mercy gives way to his justice to punish the impenitent sinner who, after undervaluing his law, despised his warnings. God still showed his mercy, because being able to flood the entire world instantly and astound the people, he wanted the water to cover it gradually so as their fear of death increased, men could start to repent from their wrongs and ask God’s forgiveness, so they would not die eternally.<sup>45</sup>

The second topic highlighted here is the person of Jesus. Even though his followers might have seen Conselheiro as the messiah, the *Good Jesus Conselheiro*—as some would refer to him,<sup>46</sup> he did not wish to be known as the Savior. On the contrary, his humility was intrinsic to his personality and a centerpiece of his ministry. In Conselheiro’s writings, Jesus is recognized many times as the true Savior and Redeemer of humankind. The way that Conselheiro writes

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<sup>44</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 107 (226).

<sup>45</sup> “Por este tremendo exemplo se mostra que Deus é, sim, paciente; mas que sua misericórdia tem enfim um termo onde há lugar à sua justiça para punir o pecador que não for penitente e que, depois de menoscar a sua lei, despreza os seus avisos. Deus ainda usou de bondade, porque podendo num instante inundar toda a terra e abismar seus habitantes, quis que as águas fossem cercando pouco a pouco para que à proporção que o medo da morte ia aumentando, fossem os homens arrependendo-se de suas maldades e pedirem perdão a Deus, querendo por este modo que não morressem eternamente aqueles que para o tempo não podiam mais viver.” Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 118 (287–88), author’s own translation.

<sup>46</sup> Otten, “Só Deus é Grande,” 21.

about the hypostatic union impresses the reader with the depth of his faith. He has no doubt that Christ is true God who became flesh to pay for the sins of the world.<sup>47</sup> He recognized that “a God who would die to save mankind” is a mystery to the rationalist, yet that was the way that heaven and earth were reconciled.<sup>48</sup>

In Antônio Conselheiro’s writings, there is one aspect of redemption through Christ that might strike the reader as surprising, namely, that through Jesus, God wants to acquire the love of people.<sup>49</sup> The Father’s “need of being loved” by his people, as expressed in Conselheiro’s writings, derives from the writings of Father Manuel Couto. In fact, in his *Missão Abreviada*, Couto pictures the immense love of God for his children in a remarkable way.

I thought, Lord, that you were a Supreme God, above whom there is no one; so it is, and that is how I believe; however, now I see that there is another God whom you serve, love, and seem to adore. And who is it? Man; man is the God of God! Man is so loved by God, as if he is his God! [. . .] the Eternal Father, filled with this extreme love, gives his Son to die; and this Son appears blind with love, and because of this love sacrifices himself to die for mankind!<sup>50</sup>

Conselheiro does not go this far—he never says that man is “the God of God”—but Couto’s influence is noticeable when he writes, for example, that Jesus had suffered all “to acquire our love.”<sup>51</sup> This elevation of man is not, in any way, to portray humankind as perfect or powerful or

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<sup>47</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 61 (28).

<sup>48</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 164 (502).

<sup>49</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 110 (243).

<sup>50</sup> “Eu pensava, Senhor, que vós ereis[sic] um Deos[sic] Supremo, acima de quem não há outro Deos; assim é, e eu assim o creio; porém agora vejo que há um outro Deos a quem vós servis, amaes[sic], e parece que adoraes[sic]. E quem é? É o homem; o homem é o Deos do grande Deos! O homem é ão ama de Deos, como se fõra[sic] seu Deos! [. . .] o Eterno Pae[sic], arrebatado d’este excesso d’amor, entrega seu Filho é[sic] morte; o mesmo Filho apparece[sic] cego de amor, e por amor se offerece[sic] a morrer pelo homem!” Couto, *Missão Abreviada*, 86–87, author’s own translation.

<sup>51</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 161 (489).

to make men “little gods.” Instead, it is to show how grand the love of God for men is, so much so that Jesus came, filled with love, as the only one capable of satisfying God’s justice.<sup>52</sup>

Given what Conselheiro believed about Christ, it comes as no surprise that he preached about salvation. His preaching, however, was not typical of the day but contained features unique to the Canudos community. To be sure, Conselheiro understood that God wished to save every person, and for that to happen, people had to leave sin behind and adopt a life in accordance with God’s commandments and Jesus’ teachings.<sup>53</sup> This teaching is a variation on the characteristic *collective salvation* of a millenarian movement. At Canudos, this meant that even though salvation is for everyone, every individual had to achieve it on their own, and the leader was committed to lead the followers to that path. The idea of collective salvation typical of millenarian movements can be either earthly or heavenly.<sup>54</sup> Canudos is an example of collective salvation with regard to life on earth, since the community is dedicated to living out God’s commands collectively. When Conselheiro speaks of a heavenly salvation, however, the collective element recedes and the individual plays the only role in ultimately achieving it.

As might be expected, Canudos does not perfectly fit every aspect of a millenarian movement as it has come to be defined by scholars. In addition, evidence from those who heard Conselheiro preach often provides information that adds further texture to the sermonic material he recorded in his book. One example of this has to do with the question of *imminent salvation*.<sup>55</sup> In the few occasions that Antônio Conselheiro wrote about salvation, he never mentioned a “near end” resulting in a collective repentance. On the contrary, he speaks about the hope that “one

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<sup>52</sup> Otten, “Só Deus é Grande,” 22.

<sup>53</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 110 (244).

<sup>54</sup> Wessinger, *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence*, 7.

<sup>55</sup> Cohn, *The Pursuit*, 15; Talmon, “Millenarian Movements,” 159; Wessinger, *Millennialism, Persecution, and Violence*, 7.

day” he and his followers would be part of God’s glory.<sup>56</sup> In his farewell it is clear that he was not thinking about something imminent, but a time that would come in the future

[. . .] be sure that the peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, our light and strength, will remain in your spirit: He will defend you from the miseries of this world; *one day* you will obtain the prize that the Lord has prepared (if you convert sincerely to Him) that is the eternal glory.<sup>57</sup> (emphasis mine)

Yet the book may not tell the entire story. The people who witnessed the events of Canudos remembered Conselheiro’s preaching on the end somewhat differently:

The kingdom of the anti-Christ is near. After that, the kingdom of God will come to save all of those who were penitents and that will be the end of this century and the beginning of the labor pains. [. . .] Parents will not recognize their children, nor children will recognize their parents. These signs and others will happen in the coming century.<sup>58</sup>

This account came from interviews with survivors made by José Aras. This quotation and others suggest that Antônio’s public preaching did proclaim an imminent end of the world. “The last days had arrived,” he said, “no one should doubt it, because everything is corrupted by sin.”<sup>59</sup> Since he recognized the Republic as the Antichrist, it made perfect sense to see that the end of times had finally arrived. In April of 1894 in a farm called Coiquí that belonged to one of his followers, he said:

The kingdom of the Antichrist has arrived. He is already in Brazil. It does not have the power to enter the *Belos Montes*, because the Good Jesus does not allow it to cross the lines of the hills that surround our Jerusalem.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 170 (540).

<sup>57</sup> “[. . .] Podeis entretanto estar certos de que a paz do nosso Senhor Jesus Cristo, nossa luz e força, permanecerá em vosso espírito: Ele vos defenderá das misérias do mundo; um dia alcançareis o prêmio que o Senhor tem preparado (se converterdes sinceramente para Ele) que é a glória eterna.” Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 181 (624), author’s own translation.

<sup>58</sup> “O reino do anti-Cristo está perto. Depois virá o reino de Deus para salvar aqueles que estiverem em penitência e será neste[sic] fim de século o princípio das dores. [. . .] Os pais não reconhecerão os filhos, nem êses[sic] reconhecerão os pais. Êsses sinais e outros vêm no século vindouro.” Aras, *Sangue de Irmãos*, 11, author’s own translation.

<sup>59</sup> Aras, *Sangue de Irmãos*, 21.

<sup>60</sup> “É chegado o reino do anti-Cristo. Êle[sic] já está no Brasil. Não tem poderes para entrar em Belos Montes,

Perhaps the feeling that the end was near became more prominent in Conselheiro's message after the founding of the Republic. The association of the new government system with the Antichrist made Conselheiro decide that it was time for them to move to a quiet place away from the main population centers.<sup>61</sup> Even though the word "Jerusalem" was applied above to Canudos, the idea of the Belo Monte, being interpreted as the New Jerusalem, does not seem to fit the original purpose of the community. After the second military campaign, Aras explains that Conselheiro's people did not seem to be worried about the rumors of the organization of another attack by the military, because to them the Belo Monte was Noah's Ark, and Antônio was Noah, whose was mission to save everyone.<sup>62</sup> Otten adds that the people did not believe their community was paradise but a place to get closer to salvation. At Canudos, the Church was being restored and would triumph with Christ.<sup>63</sup>

Perhaps, as Vasconcellos proposed, the community is better described as the New Canaan.<sup>64</sup> Canaan was the promised land described in the book of Exodus, given by God to the Hebrews that were suffering under slavery in Egypt and claimed to be rescued. Moses was the leader who guided them towards this land "flowing with milk and honey."<sup>65</sup> In his description of Canudos, the Capuchin João Evangelista reported that the propaganda produced by Conselheiro's followers encouraged everyone to go to Canudos, because it was "the promised

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porque o Bom Jesus não consente que êle atravesse estas linhas de serras que circundam a nossa Jerusalém." Aras, *Sangue de Irmãos*, 29, author's own translation.

<sup>61</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 171 (545).

<sup>62</sup> Aras, *Sangue de Irmãos*, 79.

<sup>63</sup> Otten, *Só Deus*, 354.

<sup>64</sup> Pedro L. Vasconcellos, "Para o Futuro e para o Fim que não termina: Horizontes do Belo Monte de Antônio Conselheiro," *Reflexão* 40 (2015): 70.

<sup>65</sup> Exod 3:7–8.

land, with a river of milk” and “hills made of couscous.”<sup>66</sup> This report was also quoted by Da Cunha, who emphasized the false hopes given by “the sect”<sup>67</sup> regarding the Belo Monte and calls it the “sacred Canaan” ironically.<sup>68</sup> Years after the war, the accounts saying that Canudos was the land of a milk river and couscous walls were still alive.<sup>69</sup> They also compared the two leaders, Antônio Conselheiro and Moses, the rivers Vaza-Barris and the Nile or even the Red Sea, and the hills of Cocorobó and Mount Sinai.<sup>70</sup> If the context is analyzed, the idea of a group of people that was oppressed and suffered under the hands of the powerful could be a connection between the Hebrews and the *conselheiristas*.<sup>71</sup>

Conselheiro and his followers fervently believed the land of Canudos to be the best way to preserve their religion given the significant changes taking place in the nation. Conselheiro addressed this situation in the last part of his writings. In demonstrating the evil that the Republic represented to Christianity, he left no doubts about what he believed to be the agenda behind this new system of government: the extermination of religion and the oppression of the faithful.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, Conselheiro also showed his trust in a loving God, stating that their religion would last until the end of the world,<sup>73</sup> because God would protect his creation against the “work of iniquity,”<sup>74</sup> namely, the Republic. Antônio Conselheiro asserted that religion alone was able to

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<sup>66</sup> Marciano, *Relatório*, 5.

<sup>67</sup> Da Cunha, *Os Sertões*, chap. 2, Kindle.

<sup>68</sup> Da Cunha, *Os Sertões*, chap. 2, Kindle.

<sup>69</sup> Nelson de Araújo, *Pequenos Mundos: um Panorama da Cultura Popular na Bahia* (Salvador: UFBA, 1988), 2:46.

<sup>70</sup> Aras, *Sangue de Irmãos*, 149.

<sup>71</sup> Vasconcellos, “Para o Futuro e para o Fim,” 70–71.

<sup>72</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 175 (561–63).

<sup>73</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 175 (563).

<sup>74</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 176 (565).



sanctify the sinner and destroy the sin.<sup>75</sup> According to his thinking, if someone or something tried to destroy the religion, it could be only as a representative of sin itself, that is, evil itself.

Conselheiro understood the responsibility he had for the thousands of people who were living at the community of Canudos. These men and women were willing to fight to protect not just their faith but also their leader, who may even have been more important to them than the religion itself. When he was almost a hundred years old, Honório Francisco de Assunção, better known as Honório Vilanova,<sup>76</sup> the man in charge of the community's finances and one of the survivors of the war, summarized the settlement of Canudos and Antônio Conselheiro:

Canudos was a village like any other, where people lived an ordinary life; it had its own community and organizational system; at Canudos it was possible to identify, side by side, faith in God and the simple and human mysteries. The *Peregrino* was a good and harmless *beato*,<sup>77</sup> whose life was to show the path to eternal salvation.<sup>78</sup>

The Belo Monte was a safe haven from the threat the Republic represented to their faith. Yet living there was not enough to obtain the salvation preached by Antônio Conselheiro. The only way to obtain salvation was through Jesus Christ. Conselheiro spoke about that at the dedication of their new church at Canudos when he said that Jesus is “our only hope” and “apart from him there is no salvation.”<sup>79</sup> The Belo Monte community was special for its people because it represented refuge, while to others it was another sect, a revolutionary settlement, or as Da Cunha called it, the “Tróia de taipa,”<sup>80</sup> a reference to the famous city of Troy located in Asia

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<sup>75</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 177 (602).

<sup>76</sup> Macedo, *Memorial de Vilanova*, 27.

<sup>77</sup> Levine's definition: “A lay ascetic of the backlands who lived as if a member of a religious order, consecrated in status by a curate.” Levine, *Vale of Tears*, 328.

<sup>78</sup> “Canudos era uma vila como outra qualquer, levando uma existência normal, com sua comunidade e organização próprias, onde coabitavam a fé em Deus e os mistérios simples e humanos. O Peregrino era um bom e inofensivo beato, que vivia para apontar os caminhos da salvação eterna.” Macedo, *Memorial de Vilanova*, 31, author's own translation.

<sup>79</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 172 (549).

<sup>80</sup> Da Cunha, *Os Sertões*, chap. 2, Kindle.

**Minor. But this “Tróia” was made of clay, which for its residents was sufficient.**

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

Analyses of the messianic-millenarian community of Canudos from a theological point of view are still scarce, but new studies of the writings of Antônio Conselheiro continue to appear. The intent of the present research was to help with this aspect of the scholarship, focusing on the movement's leader's writings, since the entire movement was guided by and based on its leader and his beliefs.

Antônio Conselheiro had been wandering around Northeast Brazil since the 1880s, fixing churches and gathering people wherever he went. Even though most of the priests did not see him as a problem, the Catholic church of the state of Bahia prohibited its churches from having any type of relationship with the wanderer and his followers. The church saw him as a false prophet and a threat to the institution itself, and this feeling was evidenced by the visit of the Capuchins in 1895 to the community of the Belo Monte. Conselheiro was more popular than most of the priests, and more trustworthy, because he not only preached Jesus's teachings but followed them as well, encouraging those who felt inclined to live a sanctified life to follow him. These followers desired to dissociate themselves from everything they considered related to the Republican government, for they intended to be purified and isolated from every form of perverse authority.

Antônio Conselheiro's theology is noticeably rooted in Catholicism. The veneration of Mary and the saints is seen in their everyday prayers even during the attacks, and in his writings. He constantly emphasized that the assurance of salvation is based only upon Jesus Christ because

of his grace and mercy toward the world. Conselheiro was very persistent in his advice that each individual of the community should seek a humble and sanctified life, in addition to following the rules—which were based on the teachings of Scripture. True repentance, contrition, and penance were part of the sanctified life expected from the inhabitants of the Belo Monte by their leader. The need to suffer in order to obtain the reward of God’s mercy was exalted during the period of persecution and the attacks against Belo Monte. Its inhabitants gladly suffered in a holy war against the devil because of their devotion to Christ.

It is noteworthy that even though the monarchical system was defended by Antônio Conselheiro, Canudos did not adopt this system. Conselheiro was never identified as “king” or “emperor” of Belo Monte. Oftentimes he was recognized by his people as a saint or a prophet, but never as a political leader. The community was led by Antônio Conselheiro and a group of twelve men, which created a social distinction between the rest of the people and the twelve. This distinction did not seem to interfere with the community’s life or create a feeling of outrage among those who did not belong to the group. On the contrary, the population felt safer because those people were in charge.

Regarding how the people of Canudos were perceived by others and by themselves, I found that those outside of the community could not easily understand what they were, which is evidenced by the range of different opinions. For instance, some would see them as monarchists, while others would call them a group of insane people, but only a few would regard them as God’s faithful people. In their own eyes, they were the faithful followers of God, the chosen people, who were battling against the devil represented by the instituted government.

The identification of Canudos as messianic and millennial due to its Sebastianic influence by some authors seems not to be accurate. The classification of the movement as messianic-

millenarian is based on a group of features presented mostly throughout the years of conflict, such as the idea of isolation as a way to achieve the goal to be closer to salvation, the leader being identified as the truthful agent of God, and their confidence in fighting a holy war. Antônio's influence of Sebastianism is known before the settlement of Belo Monte started, but not after.

The access to international newspapers enabled this researcher to find new information about events happening during the years that followed the proclamation of the Republic. Republican attacks against the conservative agents that identified themselves as monarchists were not mentioned in Brazilian newspapers because of censorship. Some of the international correspondents explained how journalists—employers of monarchists newspapers, had to deal with violence due to the supposed connection with Canudos, and how the government did nothing to stop those acts. Over time the attacks decreased, and international newspapers turned their attention to the “fanatics” and the “rebel stronghold” that Canudos became under Antônio Conselheiro, a “religious enthusiast.”

The analysis of Conselheiro's notebook and testimonies from survivors and other people who knew the community and its leader allowed this researcher to better comprehend the complexity of Canudos' leader. From his writings, his main concern seems to have been to lead people to salvation at an End that will come eventually. Yet according to testimonies of witnesses, in his homilies Antônio Conselheiro called people to the imminent End arriving soon because of the presence of the Republic depicted as the Antichrist. This second Conselheiro was a great preacher who used his eloquence to point out to people not only the necessity to convert, but also, the necessity to be away from any corrupted system, which is corroborated in his writings:

[The President] believes he may rule Brazil as if he were a legitimate monarch appointed by God. [ . . . ]

Even if it [the Republic] brought good things to the nation, by itself it is bad because it goes against God's will, being a transgression of his divine law.<sup>1</sup>

I would not say that his preaching contradicts his writings in any way. It is likely that he was a very enthusiastic speaker, which led him to preach about the urgency the situation required.

Over a hundred years after the Canudos tragedy, Antônio Conselheiro continues to be an important figure in Brazilian history. There are still questions to be asked and answered about Conselheiro and the settlement of Canudos. Did the events of Canudos change the religiosity of the population from nearby villages in the years that followed? Did the Catholic church ever regard Canudos as a Christians' gathering? How did other Christian groups comprehend the community of Canudos? As interesting as these questions may be, they fall beyond the scope of the present study, but I offer them here as suggestions for future research.

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<sup>1</sup> Nogueira, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 176 (567).

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## **VITA**

**Celiane da Rocha Witt Vieira**

**April 18, 1985**

**Três Forquilhas/Rio Grande do Sul – Brazil**

### **Collegiate Institutions Attended**

**Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul – UFRGS, Porto Alegre/RS – Brazil, Bachelor of  
Arts in History, Teaching, 2011**