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Between Subjection and Accommodation

The Development of José de Anchieta's Missionary Project in Colonial Brazil

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Abstract

This article provides an explanation for why José de Anchieta, S.J., the most influential missionary in early colonial Brazil, engaged in apparently contradictory evangelization practices. Anchieta's belief that both subjection and accommodation were necessary in the process of converting natives is evidenced by his epic poem, *De gestis Mendi de Saa*, which praised Governor Mem de Sá for the peace he brought to Brazil. The climax of the poem is the death by cannibalism of a bishop. This act, in the minds of Anchieta and fellow Portuguese colonists, constituted a cause for just war. While Anchieta's initial evangelization strategies were focused on taming "savages" by subjecting them to the laws of the colonial governor and altering their indigenous customs, after a relative state of peace was established in the Jesuits' mission villages Anchieta was able to catechize with great attention to indigenous sensibilities. An analysis of his most popular play, *On the Feast of St. Lawrence*, highlights how European and indigenous customs combined on the stages of colonial Brazil. Through Anchieta's poetry and drama, we see that there were many ways of proceeding among the Jesuits, and that their apparent contradictions are better understood in view of their ultimate purpose: converting souls.

Keywords

Brazil – Jesuits – Portuguese empire – just war – cannibalism – force – subjection – missions – José de Anchieta – Mem de Sá

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In 1556, the Bishop of Bahia, Pedro Fernandes Sardinha, set sail for Portugal after five years of service in Brazil. As he approached the northern captaincy of Alagoas, the weather turned treacherous. “All of a sudden, thunder began to be heard, rolling in the vastness of the sky: frightening thunderbolts grew angry from the collision of the clouds, and lightning flashes rent the heavens. The south wind threw itself, twisting the waves in vortexes and jolting the dark sea into horrendous whirlpools.”¹ The ship was very near the land of the Caetes, known as ferocious Indians who partook of cannibal feasts. Sardinha prayed that he might be spared from becoming their dinner. His prayers were in vain. After the Portuguese washed ashore the Caetes killed, dismembered, and feasted upon them. In 1558, the Portuguese governor, Mem de Sá, hearing of the cannibal feast, wanted “to avenge these cruel deaths and to tame the ferocious enemy with retaliation [...]. They [the Portuguese] await great works for the honor of Christ and for the conquest of true glory.”²

These lines appear in José de Anchieta’s *De gestis Mendi de Saa*, the first epic poem concerning the American continent. *De gestis* predates *The Lusians* by Luis de Camões (c.1524–1580). Both were works of Renaissance Humanists associated with the University of Coimbra. As Camões aimed to warn the Portuguese of the dangers inherent in the pursuit of commerce and riches, Anchieta described the dangers involved in Christianizing the New World, arguing that extreme and chaotic surroundings justified the Portuguese presence. The poem was published in 1563 in Coimbra. The story of the cannibal feast illustrates how sixteenth-century Portuguese justifications of conquest and colonialism included the rhetoric of civilizing “savages,” and advocating violent wars against “barbaric enemies” to glorify both God and self.

Currently the question of missionary support of violence in the early modern world has receded in the historiography on Jesuit missions, in favor of approaches that aim to show the culturally hybrid and accommodating nature of Jesuit practices. Yet the use of force and subjection was just as much a part of the missionary strategy of José de Anchieta, the most influential Jesuit in the early Brazilian mission, as his ability to accommodate. Some historians, and Anchieta himself, have labeled his strategy as one of “terror and subjection,” while others have exalted his adaptability to native customs.³ What should be

Fernández-Armesto and Carole Straw for their comments and suggestions for further readings, as well as the anonymous peer-reviewers.

1 José de Anchieta, *De gestis Mendi de Saa: poema épico*, ed. Armando Cardoso (São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 1986), 187, vv. 2128–2132.

2 *Ibid.*, 193, vv. 2296–2300.

3 For scholarship on subjection and fear in Anchieta’s works, see Marleine Paula M. e Ferreira de Toledo, “Anchieta, o épico,” in *Anchieta em Coimbra: Actas do Congresso Internacional*,

made of this apparent contradiction in Anchieta's missionary tactics? How and why did Anchieta maneuver between subjection and adaptation? In epic poetry addressed to Portuguese readers, he justified coercion; in theater designed for performance among and by natives, he crafted means of accommodation. We can consider each genre in turn.

Epic Violence

Born in the Canary Islands, Anchieta (1534–1597) went to the University of Coimbra where he expressed his desire to become a Jesuit at age seventeen. He began the novitiate on May 1, 1551 and only two years later left for Brazil, destined to spend forty-four years there. One of his many distinctions was his gift with languages, which allowed him to address indigenous people in Tupi, a European audience in Latin, and the colonists in Spanish and Portuguese. Anchieta wrote at times in Spanish, not only because it was his native tongue but because Spanish was commonly spoken among the elites of Portugal and Brazil until around 1700, well after the restoration of the Portuguese monarchy.⁴ After a brief stay in the port of arrival, Bahia, he traveled to São Vicente where he was in charge of teaching grammar and after two years drafted a Tupi grammar, which circulated in manuscript form until it was published in 1595 in Portugal as *Arte de gramática da língua mais usada na costa do Brasil*.⁵

In the early years of the mission, many obstacles limited catechesis to a basic level of memorization, resulting in few converts. First, the Jesuits' relationship with the governors was fraught. Governor Tomé de Sousa (1549–1553) did not permit the Jesuits to open missions in the interior. The Jesuits disagreed with the next governor, Duarte da Costa (1553–1558), over how to pacify the native peoples. The Jesuits also disapproved of Costa's lack of concern for addressing the moral lassitude of the colonists. The colonists' cruel enslavement of the Tupi and the sexual promiscuity they practiced with Tupi women

3 vols., ed. Sebastião Tavares de Pinho and Luísa de Nazaré Ferreira (Porto: Fundação Eng. António de Almeida, 2001), 3:989; Jean-Claude Laborie, "From Orality to Writing: The Reality of a Conversion through the Work of the Jesuit Father José de Anchieta (1534–1597)," *Diogenes* 48 (2000): 67. On Anchieta's accommodating strategies see, for instance, César Augusto dos Santos, "Anchieta e a cultura indígena," in *Anchieta em Coimbra*, 1:325–339.

4 Eduardo Javier Alonso Romo, "Português e Castelhana no Brasil quinhentista à volta dos Jesuítas," *Revista de Indias* 65/234 (2005): 491–510.

5 José de Anchieta, *Arte da grammática da língua mais usada na costa do Brasil* (Coimbra: António de Mariz, 1595).

also hurt the missionary cause.⁶ Furthermore, warfare among Tupi groups prevented the development of a stable environment in which to preach the Gospel. The Tamoios were attacking and destroying *aldeias*, villages set up for the purpose of cultivating a Christian way of life. In an attempt to ameliorate the situation, Anchieta and the Jesuit provincial Manuel da Nóbrega tried to negotiate peace among the feuding Tamoios and the Tupinambá. The Tamoios held Anchieta captive in Iperoig where he witnessed a cannibal feast and endured tirades by Tamoios who threatened his life on numerous occasions.⁷ Clearly, these were not ideal surroundings in which to spread the Good News.

As the situation was chaotic and volatile Anchieta adapted a policy of “bringing in people by force” and “compelling them to come in.”⁸ Anchieta, inspired by Luke 14:23, “Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in,” realized that the local situation demanded forceful evangelization. Manuel da Nóbrega (1517–1570), the founder of the Brazilian province, in his work *O diálogo da conversão do gentio* (1556), came to a similar conclusion as Anchieta, namely that the only way to convert the Indians was to impose a moderate degree of subjection.⁹ While the Portuguese Crown and the papacy forbade forced conversion, subjection was allowed, leaving open a wide range of interpretations for justifying *compelle intrare*. For Anchieta and Nóbrega, one aspect of subjection included provoking fear in the Indians, which was a necessary form of persuasion.¹⁰

Anchieta and Nóbrega likely shared common assumptions of the time about the appropriate conditions for enforcing submission on naturally ill-qualified

6 For more information on the debates over indigenous slavery between the Jesuits and colonists see Carlos Moura Ribeiro Zeron, *Ligne de foi: la Compagnie de Jésus et l'esclavage dans le processus de formation de la société coloniale en Amérique portugaise (XVIe-XVIIe siècles)* (Paris: H. Champion, 2009).

7 Anthropologists generally agree that cannibalism was practiced in Brazil. William Arens, an exception, criticized the evidence presented by Hans Staden arguing that since Staden gave the only eye-witness account, it is unlikely that anthropophagy occurred. Many anthropologists have spoken against Arens and claim that cannibalism was a practice of the Tupi. Arens failed to look at a variety of extant sources, including Jesuit reports. See William Arens, *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

8 Anchieta, *Cartas, informações, fragmentos históricos e sermões do Padre Joseph de Anchieta, S.J. (1554–1594)* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1933). “aos que nós trazemos por força” (92); “compelle eos intrare” (186).

9 Charlotte Castelnau-L'Estoile, *Les Ouvriers d'une vigne stérile: les jésuites et la conversion des Indiens au Brésil, 1580–1620* (Lisbon and Paris: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2000), 99.

10 Zeron, *Ligne de foi*, 123.

peoples. Aristotle's theory of natural slavery and the work of the medieval decretalists, in distinct ways, emphasized that conformity to the dictates of reason, especially natural law, and, in Aristotle's words, proper mastery over one's passions, exempted some people from subjection and qualified them to master others.¹¹ Anchieta frequently pointed out how the Tupi were slaves to their passions. He had a pessimistic view of Tupi nature in the early years of the mission.¹²

The legal tradition for legitimizing the conquest of infidel lands began with Pope Innocent IV (d. 1254).¹³ He defended *dominium*, or the natural right of Christians and infidels to own property and establish governments.¹⁴ The pope, however, could override infidels' rights to land as he was responsible for the salvation of all people. Offenses against natural law in the late Middle Ages exempted perpetrators from natural law's protection and constituted evidence of the absence of a true polity at which point the pope could intervene.¹⁵ Beginning in the thirteenth century, the pope could sanction conquests of infidels who violated natural law, but forced conversions were not permitted.¹⁶ Christian conquest was still debated in the fifteenth century. In the case of the Canary Islands, Eugenius IV (d. 1447) put a ban on Christian expansion in 1434 because the Spanish and Portuguese were at risk of violating pagan *dominium*.¹⁷ In 1537, Paul III (d. 1549) declared in *Sublimis Deus* (1537) that the Indians could be converted.

Debates over Christian expansion intensified in the early modern period. While the pope could issue bulls granting Iberian leaders the responsibility of converting the inhabitants of the Americas, the papacy did not have jurisdiction over land. Some jurists, such as Juan de Solórzano Pereira (d. 1655), justified Spanish possession of the Americas by claiming that a more civilized society could conquer a more barbarous one for the civil and spiritual benefit

11 Frederick Russell, *Just War in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), chs. 4–5; Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 42.

12 Zeron, *Ligne de foi*, 122.

13 James Muldoon, *Popes, Lawyers and Infidels: The Church and the Non-Christian World 1250–1550* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1979), 28–48.

14 James Muldoon, *The Americas in the Spanish World Order: The Justification for Conquest in the Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), ch. 1.

15 Michael Wilks, *The Problem of Sovereignty in the Later Middle Ages. The Papal Monarchy with Augustinus Triumphus and the Publicists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 415.

16 *Ibid.*, 17.

17 Muldoon, *Popes, Lawyers and Infidels*, 120–124.

of the Indians.¹⁸ Bartolomé de las Casas (d. 1556), Domingo de Soto (d. 1560), Francisco de Vitoria (d. 1546) and others at the School of Salamanca had earlier debated these questions with intensity.¹⁹ As Lauri Tähtinen points out, when Anchieta was writing his epic poem, cannibalism was not yet established beyond cavil as a just cause for war, yet the death of Bishop Sardinha in a cannibal feast convinced the Portuguese in Brazil that there was cause for war.²⁰

Anchieta, and to a greater extent Nóbrega, still had hope that the Tupi could live a civilized life after being subjected.²¹ After the Indian wars around Rio de Janeiro (1558–1562), Anchieta, with the help of the governor Sá, established a more peaceful and stable relationship among the natives. As many were displaced as a result of the war, Anchieta gathered together members from different indigenous groups.²² Sometimes young catechumens intermarried, contributing to greater peace. In the new circumstances, Sá's accomplishments became significant, as he was the first governor to impose laws that prohibited cannibalism and enforced a Christian way of life. Such was the historical context for Anchieta's epic poem, *De gestis Mendi de Saa*.²³

Outside a small circle of Jesuits and administrators who would have read the manuscript, we can assume that *De gestis* received most attention in the university town of Coimbra and served as propaganda to justify the Portuguese presence in Brazil and, in particular, to exalt the work of the Jesuits. Brazil symbolized the far reaches of the empire where the Jesuits could spread the faith and stamp out the growing Calvinist presence. Influenced by Virgil and Homer, medieval works of chivalry, and literature surrounding the crusades and reconquest of Iberia, Anchieta was armed with a language and style to create suspense and describe in detail many battles on Brazilian soil in his poem of

18 Muldoon, *The Americas in the Spanish World Order*, 49.

19 For how these debates applied to Brazil see Lauri Tähtinen, "The Ideological Origins of the Portuguese Empire in Brazil" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2012), 103–109.

20 Ibid., 39–42.

21 Zeron, *Ligne de foi*, 122.

22 The Tupi were divided among themselves. Those that were against the Jesuits were the Tamoios, allied with the French and the Tupinaquins from São Vicente. The Jesuits made friends with the Teminminós and Maracajás from Rio. They were sometimes on good terms with the Tupinaquins from Bahia and Espírito Santo. The Carijós were also on friendly terms with the Jesuits and Anchieta placed great confidence in their potential for conversion. See Eduardo d'Oliveira França and Sonia A. Siqueira, "O indígena de Anchieta," in *Anchieta em Coimbra*, 1:412.

23 The author is presumed to be José de Anchieta. Armando Cardoso attributes the authorship to Anchieta, as the poem contains similar ideas, concepts, and expressions found in his other works. See Cardoso's introduction in Anchieta, *De gestis Mendi*, 18–20.

3,058 lines. The poem recounts the first three years of the Portuguese governor general Sá's activities in Brazil (1558–1560), as the Jesuits fought to reform indigenous customs and eliminate the French presence in Guanabara Bay. Book One recounts the accomplishments and death of Sá's son, Fernão, in Brazil. Book Two praises Sá and his ability to impose order. He commanded the Jesuits to form four *aldeias*: São Paulo, São Tiago, São João, and Espírito Santo. Book Three of the epic poem recounts the various Indian wars that occurred in 1558 and 1559 and how Sá put an end to the fighting and abolished ritualistic cannibalism.²⁴ Anchieta focused on the battle against the Indians at Paraguaçu in 1559 as a result of the cannibal death of the bishop of Bahia in 1556. Book Four narrates the fall of the French fort in Rio de Janeiro and the defeat of heresy. Anchieta employed mostly oral sources to write the poem.²⁵ He took the testimonies of captains, survivors of a shipwreck, soldiers of Sá, and fellow Jesuits.²⁶

Anchieta traced the story of the redemption of humanity through that of Sá. Just as Virgil's *Aeneid* served to legitimize the reign of the emperor Augustus, so too Anchieta's epic poem legitimized the reign and wars of Sá, but in a manner that portrayed Sá as imitating Christ. In setting up this parallel between Christ's work and that of the governor's, the author selected certain historical views of the story of Christ's redemption of humanity.²⁷ Christ defeated the devil, liberated humanity, and transformed humankind so that it was fit for the kingdom of God. The governor did something similar in his more limited sphere, as we will see.

Anchieta justified the Portuguese presence in Brazil as an act of providence. Indeed, "All happens by divine permission."²⁸ But more than this, seemingly everything the Portuguese did was, to some degree, sacred. A series of papal bulls sanctioned the new empire.²⁹ As Anchieta saw it, God had granted

24 Peggy Reeves Sanday, *Divine Hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural System* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1986), 31 and 59. Sanday has developed a theoretical framework for understanding cannibalism. Cannibalism is never just a matter of hunger but rather is "a system of symbols and ritual acts that provides models of and for behavior. [...] Cannibalism facilitates the flow of life-generating substances and power, expresses social unity, and programs psychological reactions." It also forms part of a system where "individual and social identity are defined and biological and social reproduction ensured." The human body serves as a model for the social order.

25 *Ibid.*, 10, 36, 195.

26 *Ibid.*, 36.

27 Carole Straw brought this to my attention.

28 Anchieta, *De gestis*, 169, vv. 1756–1757.

29 C. R. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415–1825* (New York: Knopf, 1969), 23.

dominion to the Portuguese because the native Brazilians (Latin *Brasilles*, Portuguese *Brasis*) were a savage people in need of law and the doctrine of Christ. Sá's motives were holy, as was his mission: "Pious Mem de Sá desired [...] to adore the Lord of the Heaven, sea, and earth and venerate the name of Christ in the region of the south. He resolved to impose laws on the Indians."³⁰ The purpose of Sá's laws could not be separated from the task of Christianizing the Brasis; both were to honor Christ.

More than anything, cannibalism epitomized Brazilian society, and cast it beyond the pale of civilization as a jungle of violence, vice, and lawlessness. Portuguese entitlement was justified by the law of nature as well as the Christian imperative to spread the Gospel around the globe vindicated the Portuguese. The poem justified imperialism by dehumanizing the Indians. Cannibalism was an offence against natural law and so deprived practitioners of natural law's protection. For Anchieta, cannibalism justified military intervention against the Brasis. In particular, the horrible death of Bishop Sardinha at the hands of cannibals was an outrage that had to be avenged. In 1562, Sá declared just war against the Caetes who feasted upon the bishop.³¹ Nóbrega also gave a favorable opinion on war against the Caetes.³²

All the more frightening, slaughter, and consumption of human victims were part or consequence of the natives' very nature, so much so that Anchieta doubted they could change it, anymore than a tiger could change its natural instincts for prey.³³ Anchieta despaired, writing:

In what manner do you judge possible to realize your desires? That the barbarian will stop eating the human flesh that he likes? Will tigers be able to live without prey and the ferocious lions stop breaking the young bull and the wolves forgive gentle lambs? [...] Whales fill up with fish, hawks capture timid birds [...] what will make the Brasis stop devouring human flesh?³⁴

30 Anchieta, *De gestis*, 131, vv. 903–907.

31 Castelnau-L'Estoile, *Les Ouvriers d'une vigne stérile*, 111.

32 Zeron, *Ligne de foi*, 119.

33 Historians and anthropologists agree, as did Anchieta and other sixteenth-century chroniclers including Hans Staden and Jean de Léry, that "vengeance is the hermeneutical key to interpreting anthropophagic ritual." See Hans Staden, *Hans Staden's True History: An Account of Cannibal Captivity in Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), xxxiv; Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man*, 83–84.

34 Anchieta, *De gestis*, 133, vv. 959–969. All translations from *De gestis* are my own from the Portuguese or the Latin original.

For Anchieta, this savagery was linked to war, and caused by various vices driven by a passion for blood. He understood the natives as enslaved to the devil, and therefore enslaved to sin, so that it was impossible for them to do otherwise than sin.³⁵ Like the devil, the Brasis defied a holy law, which is to say, they had no laws, because only submission to God's authority brought lawfulness and righteousness. That "savage race, without the least bit of law, did many crimes against the holy laws."³⁶ Fortunately, God had subjected them to the Portuguese and their empire, taming and civilizing them:

For this reason the omnipotent Father, king of the immense universe, made the name of our monarch feared by all: after Europe, Asia, and Africa with their vast deserts, he now gave dominion over these savage-breasted Brasis, untamable people that quenched their thirsty throats with the blood of men.³⁷

By God's power, the Brasis had been conquered. Subdued, they submitted to the king and trembled before his authority.³⁸ The Portuguese had God on their side. The God who moved the heavens would also defeat the enemy. "He [God] himself, with his divine power, will defeat the ferocious enemy."³⁹ The Portuguese were destined (indeed, predestined) to conquer. They were God's agents, doing his work on earth. By definition, their enemies were diabolical and all their wars were holy, defending God and righteousness. As the Jesuit villages were burned in battle Anchieta wrote, "The chief exhorts his men to be brave and tear the enemy of Christ into pieces in bloody combat."

Conversion of the Brasis, however, was not an easy task. When Anchieta spoke of reforming and converting the indigenous people, his language communicated difficulty and strain. It was a "constant struggle" [*labor assiduus*]. He frequently used the verb *eripere*—take by force, snatch away, tear out. The work of the missionary was thankless, "A constant struggle and watching, and so many worries exhaust him. Snatching the Brasis from the jaws of the gloomy

35 Ibid., 93, vv. 131–134.

36 Ibid., 127, vv. 816–828.

37 Ibid., 167, vv. 1710–1716.

38 Previously scholars focused on classical influences on European perspectives on cannibalism. Frank Lestringant shifted the debate to include how political influences from Europe affected interpretations of cannibals in the New World. Frank Lestringant, *Jean de Léry ou l'invention du sauvage: Essai sur l'Histoire d'un voyage fait en la terre du Brésil* (Paris: Honoré Champion éditeur, 1999).

39 Anchieta, *De gestis*, 177, vv. 1922–1925.

underworld and leading them to the bountiful light of heaven.”⁴⁰ The Brasis were not to be intellectually convinced of the error of their customs, but torn away from their old habits. For Anchieta, an element of subjection was essential to conversion. As previously mentioned, he wanted to “bring in people by force” and “compel them to come in.”⁴¹ In a letter Anchieta wrote in 1563, he said, “for this type of Indian, there is no better preaching than the sword and rod of iron.”⁴² Yet, while admitting that coercion was needed to Christianize some of the population, or at least subject them to the rule of the law, Anchieta also presented conversion and submission to Portuguese authority as voluntary, deliberate, enthusiastic, even desperately so. Anchieta recounted that the native peoples actually begged to be put under the laws. In peace negotiations Anchieta reported that the Brasis stated, “Now we will not refuse the weight of subjection. Give us peace, we beg, o chief. Put us under the laws you wish, we will comply with them.”⁴³

Sá’s laws effected a spiritual transformation that was both individual and social:

In this way the passion of eating human flesh was expelled, the thirst for blood abandoned their parched throats; and the first root and cause of all evil, the obsession of killing enemies and taking their names for the glory and triumph of the victor, was exiled. They learned now to be meek and release the stain of crime from their hands, which, a short time ago danced in enemy blood.⁴⁴

The laws drove the dangerous blood-lust from individuals, so that the love of war and the enemy’s flesh no longer tainted them. Purged of these passions, the Brasis were now meek, and innocent of crime. Their nature had fundamentally changed for the better. Here, again, was the echo of a traditional theme, that Christ brought a “reform to a better state” [*reformatio ad melius*], a view of the redemption that goes back to Christian antiquity.⁴⁵

Anchieta saw Sá’s laws as bringing the Brasis to a far better state. More than anything, the prohibition of cannibalism forced them away from barbarism.

40 Ibid., 147, vv. 1277–1279.

41 Anchieta, *Cartas, informações*, 92, 186.

42 Ibid., 186.

43 Anchieta, *De gestis*, 183.

44 Ibid., 139, vv. 1096–1103.

45 Gerhart B. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

Sá imposed “laws on the Indians who live as wild beasts to refrain their barbarous habits. He immediately outlawed cruel anthropophagy: no longer permitting that those moved by violent gluttony drink fraternal blood, nor violate the holy rights of Mother Nature and the laws of the Creator.”⁴⁶ For Anchieta, a “better state” meant that the Tupi were closer to salvation. In terms of the quality of life on earth, however, the Tupi were exposed to disease and epidemics in the *aldeias*.

The Indians crossed the threshold, leaving behind the life of vices and cannibalism that violated natural and divine law, to enter human civilization. In 1558, Sá promulgated three laws for the sake of establishing peace with the indigenous tribes of Bahia and to aid their catechesis.⁴⁷ The governor’s first act was to legislate what was already self-evident natural law: a prohibition of cannibalism. It was also the foundation of any civil society. In effect, Sá’s laws redeemed the natives from a sinful society by reforming their practices. His laws re-molded the most basic aspects of native life. Anchieta presented Governor Mem de Sá as a Christ-figure and savior of Brazil. Just as Christ brought a new law to replace the old Mosaic Law, Sá subjected the people to a new law. And as God sent his only son to redeem humanity by defeating the devil, God sent Sá to defeat the devil and the vices that doomed the Brasis. Sá ushered in hope for salvation by helping the Indians to overcome their ungodly natural instincts.⁴⁸ Anchieta and Sá offered a prescription for peace in tribal society by ending war and cannibalism simultaneously. Conversion to Christ was the key to this great transformation.

Sá’s second decree ordered that the Indians could not fight without approval of the governor. The third law stated that they should come together in *aldeias*, or villages established for the purpose of evangelization, to form a republic that would aid the process of conversion.

In the beginning, in order to subdue these rude savages to the submission of the law and mold them by the doctrine of Christ, he ordered that they should leave their lairs, fields, and forests, come from all places to one site and there construct new houses, construct new villages and begin to leave behind their old habits of wild beasts; that they do not wander from here

46 Anchieta, *De gestis*, 131, vv. 906–911.

47 Anchieta, *Cartas, informações*, 161.

48 Three barbarous customs related to cannibalism were sexual excess, eating filth, and sacrifice. They will not be treated here, yet they are important to an understanding of anthropophagic ritual. See Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man*, 88–89. For more on sexuality see Lestringant, *Cannibals: The Discovery of the Cannibal from Columbus to Jules Verne* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

to there, like tigers, through the woods, without a definite home, always from one land to another, without ever staying in a stable village.⁴⁹

The Jesuit provincial, Manuel da Nóbrega, who aided Sá in drafting the laws, also confirmed their effectiveness. He said that the customs of the Brasis had changed and that many now obeyed the law of the governor and did not eat human flesh, except for one group not under subjection.⁵⁰

The Jesuits constructed a society by striving to settle nomadic groups in villages with both secular and ecclesiastical authorities to keep order. Through physical places of worship and buildings, they brought people together in community under the authority of the parish priest. Just as Christ reformed humanity, ushering in a new society and new age, the Jesuits created a new society through the creation of a communal living space. This new social structure also served the king and his empire. Once the Brasis were under the authority of the Crown, Sá ordered that the “pacified and meek pay annual tribute to the great Lusitania King, whose greatest desire is to spread among the savage peoples the doctrine of the eternal Lord of the universe.”⁵¹ Empire benefited religion, and religion profited empire. The Portuguese empire was, for Anchieta, essential for the process of conversion because only in imposing the laws of the central ruler could the Brasis be civilized and converted.

The Jesuits created a militant society, constantly fighting the devil in their struggle to eradicate old habits and vices. The crusade against cannibalism, polygamy, drunkenness, and violence turned out to be a long, arduous battle because the devil was always a threat, not just in the stubbornness and resistance of the colonists and Indians to moral reform, but also in the threat posed by Protestants. *De gestis* culminates in Book Four, where the French presence potentially jeopardizes all the work that the Jesuits and the Portuguese Crown undertook thus far to secure the salvation of the Tupi. Referring to the Protestants, Anchieta said, “Even more: with the heart infected by heresy, and with the mind oppressed by the darkness of error, not only do they all distance themselves from the straight path of belief, but they try to corrupt the miserable Indian peoples, ignorant of everything, with false doctrines.”⁵²

The presence of Protestants in Brazil also justified the Portuguese presence. In Anchieta’s view, if hearts were oppressed by error or heresy, then the Portuguese were justified in war. The Portuguese were God’s agents, doing his

49 Anchieta, *De gestis*, 137, vv. 1027–1035.

50 *Ibid.*, 258.

51 *Ibid.*, 167, vv. 1697–1699.

52 *Ibid.*, 195, vv. 2327–2331.

work. The Protestants were devils who continually threatened Christians in this life, as we will observe in Anchieta's plays. His beliefs echoed a traditional Christian teaching: although Christ defeated the devil with his death on the cross, nevertheless, the devil remained in the world to tempt and test every soul to prove the merit of each individual. The trial of the soul would only be defeated at the second coming of Christ, in a final battle of good and evil at the Apocalypse.

While historians rightly reject religious motives as the driving force behind the colonization of Brazil (or anywhere else), Anchieta denied that the Portuguese had any sinful, worldly concerns. The king sent expeditions to Brazil not for greed, but for the desire to save the souls of the heathens, and to honor Christ. Anchieta stated:

It was not the precious stones of China and the riches of the Ganges, nor the aromatic spices that India pours out of its fecund breast [...], it was the burning zeal of taking your name, O Christ, to all people, in whatever climate of the earth, that moved the royal chest to confront unknown paths, works on earth, threats at sea, and to tear infuriated oceans with whole fleets that were never before navigated.⁵³

While Anchieta's poem explains his initial method of conversion in Brazil, it leaves the reader wondering how the author reconciled a crucial tension: the need to save some Tupi to complete the task of evangelization, while at the same time demonizing other Tupi in order to justify Portuguese empire. Such tensions are not seen in the writings of some of Anchieta's contemporaries. Bartolomé de Las Casas (d. 1556), for instance, believed that the Indians of the New World were not corrupt, were capable of receiving the Gospel, and had more "enlightenment and natural knowledge of God" and better laws and customs than the Greeks and Romans.⁵⁴ Michel de Montaigne (d. 1592), writing seventeen years after Anchieta, compared the culture of Brazil to that of Europe and opined, "We may then call these people barbarous, in respect to rules of reason: but not in respect to ourselves, who in all sorts of barbarity

53 Ibid., 167, vv. 1701–1709.

54 Bartolomé de las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1992), chs. 127, 262–263. For the famous debate on the rights of the Indians between las Casas and Sepúlveda see Lewis Hanke, *All Mankind Is One: A Study of the Disputation between Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda in 1550 on the Intellectual and Religious Capacity of the American Indians* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1994).

exceed them.”⁵⁵ As Anchieta’s missionary strategy evolved, and when he addressed a different audience, he was deeply devoted to the evangelization of the indigenous peoples in the Jesuit villages. We now turn to Anchieta’s gentler methods.

Accommodation: Theater

However harsh his early missionary tactics might have been, Anchieta had a lifelong devotion and concern for the Tupi. His interest in indigenous culture began with his study of the language, his translation of a catechism into Tupi (Anchieta had to think about how to make the Christian worldview intelligible to the Tupi), the poems and plays he composed in Tupi, and in his ethnographic descriptions of Brazil. Anchieta’s curiosity about Brazilian flora, fauna, and the stars of the southern hemisphere was directly related to his desire to know more profoundly the indigenous culture.⁵⁶ In a second phase (1587–1597) of Anchieta’s career, he changed genres and audiences as he skillfully wove together Tupi rhetoric and imagery with his desire to preach the Catholic faith to colonists and indigenous peoples. As Anchieta’s familiarity with the Tupi increased, his strategy became more accommodating. No longer was subjection his chief concern because a relative state of peace had been established in the *aldeias*. The 1580s and 1590s also marked a new strategy for the Jesuits in Brazil: they sought to have total domination over indigenous societies, to integrate the Tupi into colonial society, and to abolish Tupi communities.⁵⁷

Anchieta became revered in his communities as a numinous and powerful healer. His plays, some believed, had the power to invoke rain.⁵⁸ In the papacy’s eyes, his heroic virtue made him worthy of the title “Blessed,” but for the local population it was his ability to perform miracles, levitate while praying, and cast away demons which commanded attention.⁵⁹ As his reputation in society

55 Michel de Montaigne, “Of Cannibals,” in *Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Charles Cotton (London: Reeves and Turner, 1877), 260.

56 Anchieta, *Capitania de São Vicente* (Lisbon: EXPO 98, 1997). His letter from São Vicente was composed in 1560.

57 Castelnau-L’Estoile, *Les Ouvriers d’une vigne stérile*, 118.

58 Archivio della Postulazione Generale (Santi e Beati): Anchieta, Giuseppe, #34: Processi antichi e sommario, Processo di Rio de Janeiro, 1622 (fragmentario), 16^v, n. 24.

59 Archivio Segreto Vaticano: Congregazione dei Riti, Processi #303–320. His canonization records are full of eyewitness accounts by those who claimed to have seen Anchieta levitate and perform miracles. For example, processo #314, fol. 61.

grew, he gathered large audiences for his plays. His theater shows the remarkable way he incorporated indigenous language and customs into his mission.⁶⁰

Anchieta's sensitivity to indigenous customs is especially prevalent in his theatrical works. Anchieta's most popular play, *Na festa de S. Lourenço* [On the Feast of St. Lawrence], was written in Tupi, Portuguese, and Spanish. Villagers first performed the play at the chapel of St. Lawrence sometime between 1583–1587 in Niterói, located on the other side of the Bay of Guanabara (Rio de Janeiro). This play received much attention for several reasons. First, the villagers believed Anchieta had the power to postpone the rain until this play concluded.⁶¹ Second, it circulated widely along the coast of Brazil and even possibly into Paraguay.⁶² Last, the main dialogues of the play in Tupi were important moments of indigenous catechesis.

Anchieta, drawing on the popularity of St. Lawrence in Europe, made his martyrdom relevant to a culture that was accustomed to grilling people in cannibalistic rites.⁶³ The work commemorated this saint of Late Antiquity who was whipped and burned alive on top of a grill of iron with hot coals. St. Lawrence was also the patron saint of the *aldeia* in Niterói. He, along with St. Sebastian, protected Rio de Janeiro. St. Sebastian who was killed with arrows, we might conjecture, also appealed to indigenous sensibilities. Act One began at the port of the city with a procession. St. Lawrence sang from the grill, "Your blood, Redeemer, washes away all my evil; I burn on this grill, in the fire of your love!"⁶⁴

Scene Two took place in or around the church and consisted of a battle between Good and Evil. Three devils entered. Guaixará, the devil chief, and his two sons, Aimbirê and Saravaia, were real enemies. The main antagonistic tribe in Rio de Janeiro, the Tamoios, had as their chief an Indian named Guaixará, who fought with the French against Sá and his forces. The Tamoios also held Anchieta in captivity in Iperoig for two months during Indian wars.

60 For more on the background of Anchieta's plays and for an analysis of his other plays, see Anne B. McGinness, "Transforming Indigenous Vice to Virtue on the Stages of Colonial Brazil: An Analysis of Jesuit Theater and the Plays of José de Anchieta," *Lusitania Sacra* 23 (2011): 41–57.

61 Archivio della Postulazione Generale (Santi e Beati): Anchieta, Giuseppe, #34, 62^v–63.

62 See the map of the distribution of Anchieta's plays in M. de L. de Paula Martins, "Auto representado na festa de São Lourenço. Peça trilingüe do séc. XVI," *Boletim Museu Paulista* 1 (1948): 4–5.

63 For the popularity of St. Lawrence in Rome see, for instance, Gauvin Bailey's reference to the St. Stefano Rotondo martyrdom frescos, in John W. O'Malley, et al. *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts, 1540–1773* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 136.

64 Anchieta, *Teatro de Anchieta*, ed. Armando Cardoso (São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 1977), 143.

Anchieta wished to convey to the Tupinambá where their loyalty must lie. Good, personified by the martyr, had to defeat Evil, who symbolized the French and also Guaixará.

The Tamoio devils personified all of the vices of colonial society that Anchieta wished to extirpate: stealing, lackadaisical behavior, drinking, sexual promiscuity, and cannibalism. In Scene Two, which was performed entirely in Tupi, the devils wanted to destroy the city with sin. They were “mad, walking around killing and eating prisoners.”⁶⁵ The devil chief confirmed that drunkenness brought the most pleasure to the Tupi. “It’s a good thing to drink until we vomit up *cauim* [a fermented drink of cooked mandioca]. This is the greatest pleasure, this yes, let’s say, this is glory, yes it is!”⁶⁶

The martyr-saints were present to help reform the Tupi away from their vices and towards a virtuous Christian life. St. Sebastian, the protector of Rio de Janeiro, destroyed Guaixará and the Tamoios. “All the Tamoios are dead, burning in hell.”⁶⁷ Guaixará, however, lived on as the incarnation of the devil. His lingering spirit sought to harm Christians and make them sin. The Tupi, however, were in the process of turning away from sin and toward the Christian way of life. Guaixará and another devil argued about how they lost the Tupinambá to the Jesuits. Guaixará threatened the Tupi, “I do not like when a Tupi escapes from my power.”⁶⁸

The chorus actors then chastised the indigenous peoples, “Your good Frenchman gave you many firearms, but in vain. The arrows caused immense harm to St. Sebastian, at the side of Saint Lawrence.”⁶⁹ The martyrs St. Sebastian and St. Lawrence represented victory, as they triumphed over Satan, defeated the Tamoios and the devil, and ultimately conquered sin by their deaths. The chorus sang a battle cry, warning that the French would hurt the Tupinambá just as Roman emperors hurt St. Sebastian and St. Lawrence. This play conveyed to the Tupinambá where their loyalty must lie.

Act Three focused on St. Lawrence’s death. St. Lawrence died on the grill and an angel called to the devils to come and take his perpetrators. The angel said, “The emperors who killed St. Lawrence remain. They burn in intense fires in punishment for their horrors.”⁷⁰ The devils then spoke of Decius and Valerian,

65 Ibid., 146. All translations are my own from Portuguese or Spanish. The original parts of the play in Tupi were translated into Portuguese by Cardoso.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid., 150.

68 Ibid., 148.

69 Ibid., 163–164.

70 Ibid., 166.

about the immorality of their actions and how they belonged eternally in hell. Ambirê said to Valerian, “You honored me and always satisfied me, offending God eternal, it is just that in my hell, the palace that you loved so much, you do not pass poorly your winter.”⁷¹ The audience learned how unjustly Valerian and Decius treated St. Lawrence. The Tupi were instructed that roasting a victim would send them to hell.

Act Four was the moral conclusion of the play, performed in Portuguese. St. Lawrence’s body was put in the tomb, and then an angel entered with the two characters, Fear and Love of God. Fear of the Lord said to the audience, “St. Lawrence really hates the sin that you love, a thousand pains he suffered, and he burned in the fires; for not sinning, he died.”⁷² Then the audience, looking up to the sky, saw St. Lawrence reigning with God. The play ended with a procession in Act Four and a dance of twelve children singing, “Pagan emperors are roasted on the grill, their whole body with gashes, on metal grills of pains.”⁷³

We might imagine that the natives related to the martyrdom of St. Lawrence but on their own terms. Tupi scholar Paula Martins claims, “The scene of this martyr must have aided, in a special way, the catechism of Brazil, where sacrifices of war were habitual and the Indians were used to grilling their victims.”⁷⁴ Interestingly, Anchieta chose to make plays about several martyrs who were killed by war tactics familiar to the people he was missionizing. Yet, while adapting to indigenous language and customs, Anchieta also reconfigured the methods by which the Tupi traditionally killed their enemies (with club, arrows, decapitation, and the grill) as the martyrs’ vehicle of salvation.

Conclusion: Salvation of Souls

There were many ways of proceeding among the Jesuits in colonial Brazil because ministering to colonists and Tupi required different strategies at different times. Barbarous customs, cannibal feasts, and warfare among the Tupi called for the use of force and subjection to Christian laws. Both the presence of French Calvinists and the “savage” customs of the natives justified Portuguese empire; yet while all Calvinists fell outside of redemption, only some enemy natives did. Since the Protestant presence was seen as illegal, it was necessary

71 Ibid., 173.

72 Ibid., 181.

73 Ibid., 189.

74 Martins, “Auto representado na festa de São Lourenço,” 7.

to expel them from Brazil and educate the Tupi about their evil ways. Anchieta disliked the Protestants because they willingly rejected Catholicism, but the Tupi, who had lived in ignorance, were afforded some accommodation once they came under Portuguese law. According to the Jesuit way of proceeding, Anchieta allowed the local situation and the particular needs of a population to dictate his strategy. With the establishment of *aldeias* came a relative peace and security that allowed his imagination to flourish. His intense fascination and dedication to serve and reform the Tupi was a lifelong desire. What we might understand as a contradiction of strategies—subjection versus accommodation—was, in Anchieta's eyes, an integral labor of love that sought the salvation of souls.