ALL CAN BE SAVED

Religious Tolerance and Salvation in the Iberian Atlantic World

STUART B. SCHWARTZ
Brazil: Salvation in a Slave Society

The customs of the Portuguese settlers that are found in these towns are almost those of the Indians because although Christians, they live the life of gentiles.

—Father Manoel da Nóbrega (1558)

As the Portuguese began to cross the seas in the fifteenth century, their encounter with other lands and other peoples sharpened both confidence in their own religious obligations and mission and their conviction in the superiority of their own culture. But overseas voyaging had also raised questions about the nature of non-Christian peoples and about the validity and value of other faiths. By the mid-sixteenth century, the Portuguese had created a far-flung empire of ports and maritime outposts down the coast of West Africa and across the Indian Ocean.

In the Atlantic, after settling the uninhabited islands of the Azores and Madeira in the fifteenth century, the Portuguese made a landfall on the coast of South America in 1500, and in the next years, a colony began to slowly take form. After decades of relative neglect and desultory settlement, sometimes using penal exiles, this Brazilian colony began to flourish, first in the 1530s, when minor nobles were made donatary captains and allowed to develop their territories, then when a large expedition in 1549 established a royal capital under a governor-general at Salvador, but especially after 1560 as fields of
sugarcane were planted and began to spread along the streams that flowed to the sea in the captaincies of Bahia and Pernambuco.

The early infamy of Brazil as a colony settled by New Christians and convicts from civil and religious courts (the expedition of 1549 had included hundreds) began to fade somewhat as the colony became profitable and the origins of the first settlers were forgotten. The real key to the colony’s progress, however, was the relationship between the growth of the sugar economy and the exploitation and elimination of the indigenous Amerindian peoples and then the introduction of African slaves. This process changed the human face of the colony in terms of its population. It also brought together elements of cultural and religious systems of three continents while at the same time creating a series of overlapping inequalities based on religion, race, and origin that favored the Europeans, even the poor among them.

But in truth, the distance of the colony from civil and religious authority, the absence of strong religious or administrative controls, and the seemingly endless opportunities of a material or carnal nature had drawn all kinds of religious dissidents and people from the margins of Portuguese society as well as simply those people seeking to better their lives. Early accounts of Brazil swung from edenic descriptions of its geography and celebration of its potential to turn poor men into rich ones to demonizing descriptions of its native peoples, who were presented as naked, pagan cannibals lacking any sense of modesty or sexual morality. Many of these attributes also made the colony attractive, albeit to different groups for different reasons. Moreover, the constraints of formal religion were few. The presence and influence of the clergy in the first half century was minimal, and only in 1551 was a bishopric established at Salvador. Thus the first fifty years of settlement and the formation of society as well as the early contact between the colonists and the indigenous peoples took place before there was a strong ecclesiastical establishment and also prior to the Council of Trent and its attempt to reform and regularize Catholic practice and to establish the centrality of the priesthood and the sacraments in the everyday life of the faithful.

In Brazil, the principal agents of the Tridentine reforms when they were introduced were the members of the Society of Jesus, a newly formed religious order, itself closely linked to the Catholic Reformation. Six Jesuits had accompanied the expedition of the first governor general in 1549, and they quickly began an intense missionary effort to Christianize the indigenous populations. The Jesuits in Portugal viewed the new colony and its indigenous inhabitants as their particular enterprise, and they were willing to suffer discomforts and dangers in order to convert the pagan inhabitants of Brazil, whose barbarism and ignorance of the gospel, most felt at first, could be conquered by mission-
ary zeal. While the Jesuits became an integral part of Portuguese society in the colony and a primary influence on the educational, spiritual, and economic life of the colonists, their principal impulse was directed toward the missionary effort. They believed that the major obstacle standing in their path was the violent immorality of the Portuguese settlers, who enslaved Indians, took their women, and lived in complete disregard or ignorance of the precepts of the Church.

More than morality was involved in this struggle. The colonists viewed the Jesuit mission villages as competitors for the control of Indian workers, who were increasingly necessary on the growing sugar plantations, especially as disease and resistance made Indian labor even scarcer. Both colonists and Jesuits sought the support of the crown in this struggle. Meanwhile, there was also a dispute with ecclesiastical authority. The Jesuits argued against the first bishop of Bahia, who felt that the principal business of the Church should be the Portuguese laity, not the heathen Indians. The bishop's death at the hands of Amerindians cut short the dispute, and the Jesuit approach emphasizing the conversion of the Indians predominated until the decades of the 1580s, when the other religious orders began to establish houses in the colony and religious life was regularized under episcopal control.

As part of this process of regularization, two visits of the Inquisition were sent to the colony, one in 1591–93 and a second in 1618. Almost a thousand individuals were denounced and many arrested in an attempt to impose orthodoxy in the colony. While Judaizing New Christians were the single most accused group, the net of the tribunal in Brazil was cast widely, and in percentage terms there was more interest in the deviations, errors, and blasphemy of Old Christians than was usually the case in the Portuguese continental tribunals. The Jesuits fully collaborated with the Inquisition, and, in fact, the sessions of the visits were conducted in the Jesuit establishments of Salvador and Olinda. Only later in the seventeenth century, as we have seen in the discussion of Father António Vieira, did the interests and politics of the Jesuits and the Holy Office diverge.

It was ironic, then, that the two groups most attracted to the new colony in the sixteenth century were New Christians who hoped to find in the colony economic opportunities and some respite from their disadvantages in Portugal and the Jesuits, who first viewed the colony as a kind of purgatory but hoped to create in Brazil a Christian utopia among the heathen. Their goal was to establish a land of orthodox Catholic practice guided by the Tridentine reforms. A New Christian merchant, Diogo Lopes Ulhoa, so powerful that some had called him the Count Duke of Brazil, said at one point that “this land
was made for us and our ancestors." In a similar fashion, the Jesuit leader, Father Manoel da Nóbrega, had written from Brazil with identical conviction, "This land is our enterprise." But the Jesuit program was threatened and frustrated by the avarice, licentiousness, and ignorance of the settlers, by the presence of potential heresy represented by the New Christians, by the recalcitrance and superstition of the laity, and by the difficulties presented by the process of converting the Indians. For all these reasons, the Jesuits at first viewed the Inquisition as an ally in their project.

Conversely, the New Christians certainly did not welcome the arrival of the inquisitorial visitor, and a number of them referred to the agents of the tribunal as devils. In 1622, the inquisitor general of Portugal had argued that given the growth of the population and the nature of its people the colony needed a permanent tribunal, but the plan was never realized, owing perhaps to New Christian opposition. But in their fear and dislike of the Holy Office, they were not alone, and some of the Old Christians in Brazil also resented the imposition of orthodoxy and the limitation on freedom of conscience that the tribunal and the reforms of Trent implied.

Early Heretics

If the plan of the Jesuits and the Inquisition was to isolate Brazil from the heterodox and heretical currents that were rising in Europe, their hope was stillborn. The Portuguese colonists brought with them the full range of superstitions and beliefs, doubts, critiques, and ironies that had been expressed in Europe. They had a deeply Catholic belief and a profound religious sensibility often demonstrated in external elements of the cult. The population venerated the saints and adhered to the rites of the Church, but they were also attracted to alchemy and astronomy, to a belief in good and bad witchcraft and sorcery, and to the occult arts. On many positions of dogma there was dissent. In the minds and mouths of the colonists it is easy to find all the usually condemned propositions about the Trinity, the virgin birth, fornication, and the others. The two visits of the Inquisition for which detailed records have survived reveal the full range of the dissidence, irreverence, and questioning that was seen in Portugal itself. In addition, as we will soon see, the reality of Brazil, peopled as well by pagan and Christianized Amerindians, African slaves, and the mixed race offspring born of the contact between them and the Europeans created new situations of interaction that produced new kinds of propositions or intensified the beliefs in the old ones.

Then too there were dissidents of more educated background who were able to meet and debate with the churchmen and especially the Jesuits on a more or
less equal intellectual level, or who exercised authority of a secular nature that contested that of the Church. These men introduced ideas that were alternatives to the Jesuit theology of the Catholic Reformation, and at times their blasphemies and heresies resonated with the ideas of the general populace and sometimes with those of the Protestant heretics, or, at least, so their accusers claimed. In fact, however, much of what they said or thought sprang from the same roots of dissidence and heterodoxy from which emanated the critiques and doubts of the settlers and their mixed-race offspring.

These individuals appear relatively early in Brazilian history. The classic case is that of Pero de Campos Tourinho, the first lord proprietor of the captaincy of Porto Seguro. Tourinho was not an intellectual, but a man with a colonizing mission. A nobleman from Viana do Castelo, he began to settle his area in 1535 with a group of settlers he led out from Portugal. He was a man who often spoke freely and who did not hesitate in his irony and sarcasm to criticize the local clerics and the ecclesiastical establishment or to argue with them. The clergy was not amused. In June 1546, a coup led by a French priest took place. Tourinho was imprisoned and charged with blasphemy and sent back to Portugal in chains. The Inquisition, still in its earliest stages, held an inquiry in 1547. Although he denied most of the accusations, the charges themselves perhaps reveal the nature of his thoughts, or at least seem to be the kind of heresies that were common enough to be credible: a critique of the Mass, disrespect for the saints, criticism of the clergy for living with female companions and above all of the bishops, whom he called buggers and tyrants for being both venial and dissolute.

Mixed among such irreverence, not surprisingly, one finds an implicit religious relativism. The first charge leveled against Campos Tourinho was that when he did some task, he would say “that if God would not help him, then the faith of the Moors was better than that of the Christians, and that he would become a Moor.” The possibility of admitting the value of another religion was a serious charge, but the Inquisition apparently treated him leniently. Although he never returned to Brazil, his offspring and descendants suffered no particular infamy. If he was a heretic, “he was only an intermittent and dilettante one.” The Inquisition in Portugal was after bigger game.

Why had he been accused? Campos Tourinho claimed that his enemies objected to his rule because he had punished those who had refused to work or who were doing evil to the Indians by “sleeping with their wives and daughters, and doing other things they should not do.” In that, at least, his criticisms paralleled those of the Jesuits. How to treat the Indians and how best to lead them to salvation remained a crucial issue.

Other early dissidents were closer to more formal heresies. João de Bolés, a
Frenchman, had abandoned the French outpost at Guanabara Bay over religious differences with its leaders. He arrived in São Paulo in 1559, where his talents as an orator and his knowledge of classical languages and Hebrew impressed both the local colonists and the resident Jesuits. So too did his criticism of the pope, his disbelief in the saints, his condemnation of the venality of the clergy, and his defense of the freedom of his homeland, which, unlike Portugal and its colonies, allowed one to read whatever one wished. Eventually arrested and tried, this French humanist provoked the suspicion of his Jesuit opponents in Brazil, who believed he was planting the seeds of the Protestant heresies which, given his eloquence and knowledge, endangered the spiritual health of the colonists. This was a weed the Jesuits would not allow to grow in a colony already awash in sin. Eventually, Bolés was forced to recant his errors and reconcile himself to the Church.\textsuperscript{11}

The defenders of orthodoxy had similar fears about another foreign humanist who resided in the sparsely settled captaincy of Ilhéus, which lay to the south of Bahia. It had been developed as an extension of the sugar economy in the 1540s. The Company of Jesus had played an active role in the region since its arrival in Brazil in 1549 and had established missions among the coastal peoples, a residence in São Jorge, and various sugar plantations. Other engenhos, or sugar mills, were established with financing by Lucas Giraldes, a Florentine merchant financier resident in Lisbon who had bought the captaincy and sought to develop its sugar economy using other Florentines to manage his affairs there. The growth of Ilhéus, however, had been constrained because of the constant pressure from the native peoples, first the coastal Tupinikins and then in the 1560s the indomitable and hostile Aimoré Indians, who continually raided the Portuguese settlements and farms of the region. Even by 1600, there were probably fewer than one hundred householders at São Jorge, its capital.\textsuperscript{12}

It was in this context that a Florentine humanist named Rafael Olivi had settled in the captaincy. He may have been originally connected to the Giraldes sugar operations. Olivi resided on fazenda São João, a farm in the district of São Jorge. He was well known to his Jesuit neighbors, who considered him educated and a good Latinist who knew his Plato well. But Olivi was also something of a free thinker and talker, and given his Italian background he naturally fell under suspicion of adhering to the Protestant heresy. He had sometimes said that religion was invented to subjugate people because with arms or with empire that subjugation can never be completed.\textsuperscript{13} He was critical of the pope and of high churchmen who sinned. In addition, he sometimes referred to the sultan as a “Great Lord,” and he was heard to say that “the life
of the Turks is good,” because they were not required to attend Mass or listen to the preachers. Such statements led to his denunciation and arrest as a possible heretic in 1584.

The Inquisition’s representative arrested Olivi and seized his books. There, at Fazenda São João, he had built up an extensive library in Latin and Italian. His tastes were broad. He owned Josephus, The Jewish War, and a commentary on matters in Turkey. In the latter case the inventory referred only to a “commentari de las cosas de Turquia” so it is difficult to know exactly what he was reading. It may have been Andrés de Laguna’s Viaje a Turquia (1559), a work that was circulating in manuscript that used a description of the life and religion of the Turks as a way to criticize the ills of Spanish society, or perhaps it was Giovan Antonio Menavino’s Trattato de’ costume et vita de Turchi (Florence, 1549), but in any case, Olivi had developed a positive view of aspects of life among the Turks.14 He also owned a copy of Machiavelli’s Discourses, its author condemned in Spain and Portugal for his advocacy of a politics divested of moral considerations. His Florentine and Italian connections were strong. He had a copy (probably a manuscript copy) of Domenico de Giovanni’s “sonetti di Burchiello,” a widely circulated collection of comic poetry. He also owned a copy of the Nova scientia de Niccolò Tartaglia (1550), the widely known Italian mathematician who had also written on the mathematics of artillery. He may have also owned a copy of Dante’s Divine Comedy, although the list of his books is not always clear and the actual titles of the listed books are at times difficult to determine. Of course, he had a taste for classical authors like Aristotle, and he even had some of the erotic poetry of Catullus. Charges against him stated that he was well read in Plato. The library also included works on nobility, horsemanship, morality, and religion.15 But whatever the nature of his taste in reading, unlike João de Bolés, Olivi’s humanism and his library had not directly threatened the local clergy. Even though he seems to have been something of a free thinker whose reading included books of suspect themes and interpretations, the charges were eventually dropped, apparently because his Jesuit neighbors came to his defense. Still, his presence and his library demonstrated that even the remote spaces of the colony were not beyond the reach of alternative ideas.

To the north, in the more populous and wealthy captaincy of Pernambuco, yet another famous threat of humanism and heresy emerged, this time in the person of a New Christian poet named Bento Teixeira. Teixeira had been born in Oporto around 1560 but had come to Brazil as a child and had been educated by the Jesuits.16 He was apparently a good student because he had gained the sponsorship of highly placed people in the colony. He lived for a while in Ilhéus and had married there before moving to the thriving captaincy
of Pernambuco, where he lived as a teacher of Latin, arithmetic, reading, and writing to children, but Teixeira’s intellectual reach went far beyond elementary instruction. He had a broad education and a questioning mind. He knew the works of Fray Luis de Granada, Jerónimo de Osorio, and other theologians. He put his own hand to authorship and composed an epic poem, Prospopéia, on the conquest and colonization of Pernambuco, the first literary work produced in Brazil. He knew his Latin well, and he enjoyed discussing theology with the Benedictines when he had the opportunity. In fact, he turned to them when he most needed help. His wife’s adulteries had earned him local ridicule as a cuckold, and, exasperated, he had killed her and then sought asylum at the Benedictine monastery in 1594. It was not that act that caused his arrest, however, but rather a denunciation to the Inquisition. He had been in the habit of suspending classes on Saturdays instead of the usual Wednesdays, and this was enough to provoke suspicion that he was a Judaizer. Eventually sent to Lisbon, he confessed and was reconciled to the Church. He died in obscurity in 1600, still wearing his penitential robe.

But what was the real danger Teixeira presented to the colony? The denunciations and testimony make clear that he was a well-known figure, thought by many to be the most cultured man in Pernambuco. True, he read prohibited books and sometimes swore by the private parts of Our Lady, but his real threat lay in his theology, which he seemed willing to discuss with laymen and clerics alike. He had argued that there was no pain in hell, the pain was that of our own conscience; hell and purgatory were not real places, but more a state of being. This was a direct negation of the Thomistic accounts and of a whole literature that had described in excruciating detail the torments that awaited sinners in hell and that had turned purgatory from a waiting room in heaven to an antechamber of eternal punishment. It was a position that smacked of Erasmus or Pico della Mirandola. He had debated with the Benedictines the question of Adam’s sin and its relation to the existence of death in the world. Teixeira believed that even without eating the apple, mankind would know death. In this, there seemed to be a tendency toward a concept of predestination. That was the charge of the Jesuit António da Rocha, who reported that Teixeira had written to the Jesuits in Ilhéus suggesting in a thinly veiled way that once God had decided one’s destiny good works could not alter that course. As the Brazilian historian Adriana Romero has aptly pointed out, Teixeira’s view that man was made in God’s image and that he was composed of the four basic elements touched on a number of crucial theological issues and also displayed a familiarity with the rediscovery of ancient philosophy characteristic of the sixteenth century. Because Teixeira was a New Christian, his threat was perceived as that of a relapsed Judaizer, for that was the prism
through which the Inquisitors viewed his beliefs, but like those of Bolés or Olivi, his questions and interpretations implied doubts that went far beyond the limits of ethnic or religious origins, and while these were all men of a humanist education, much of what they believed and the nature of their questioning were shared by a far larger and much less well educated population.

Savages, Sex, and Salvation

The colonial setting presented a context for individual choice and free will. This above all made Brazil a place of considerable moral and theological danger. The bishops and the Inquisition struggled to eliminate or control this freedom, while the colonists, or moradores, although usually claiming to adhere to the precepts of the Church and the practices of “a good Christian,” sought to enjoy the liberty that the colony seemed to present. Many held that the ability to live and to think, and, for some, to read as one chose was a precious goal whose value increased as the control of everyday life intensified. In 1606, Frei Diogo de Paixão, while on an English ship, met a Portuguese from Oporto who had married in England and who served on the ship as second in command. He seemed like an honest man. Frei Diogo asked him why he lived in a land among this heretical people, to which the man responded simply, “There, he lived in freedom of conscience.” 19 Similarly, Brazil seemed to offer endless space and unlimited opportunities for such freedom and for other liberties as well. The ability to get rich by exploiting Indian labor and to live without sexual constraint with access to Indian women was a great attraction. The Jesuits thundered from their pulpits against these abuses, condemning licentiousness and liberty, not only because of their effect on the program of conversion, but also because of the peril that such sins caused for the souls of the Portuguese. God, they feared, would vent his ire on the whole colony. In the 1620s, Matheus de Sousa Coelho, vicar of Nossa Senhora da Vera Cruz in São Luís de Maranhão, observed in a case involving the sexual exploitation of the Indians of that region that his efforts and actions were intended to “avoid those offenses to God from which generally are born the punishments of America caused by the liberty of conscience with which people live in this conquest.” 20

The Portuguese colonists brought to Brazil during much of its first century the full range of beliefs and practices of European popular Catholicism. They mixed their understanding of theology and dogma with their ideas of witchcraft, sorcery, astrology, and magic and their understanding of sin, sexuality, and salvation. This was as true for New Christians as for Old Christians. 21 After 1570, the reforms of Trent began to be instituted in the colony, and
episcopal control extended over the life of the colonists, but the transformation was slow and made more difficult by the carnal opportunities and spiritual challenges created by the process of colonization and the growth of a regime of slavery with its inequalities based on origin, culture status, and eventually color.

In terms of cultural relativism, the early contact between Europeans and Indians produced a series of contradictory and challenging opinions. The Jesuits, in the face of their frustrations and sometimes their doubts, believed that the Indians had souls and could be integrated into the Christian community. The colonists were often unconvinced. In Pernambuco, Bernardo Velho had told companions that unbaptized Indians had no souls. Francisco Luís, in speaking about the cruelty of the hostile Potiguares, claimed they had “no more soul than a pig.”22 The colonists sometimes turned this belief to the advantage of their sexual gratification. Many transferred to the colonial context the old proposition that sleeping with unmarried women or prostitutes was no sin, so that now they held that sleeping with a negra, that is, an Indian, was permitted, or that at least sex with an unbaptized Indian was no sin. The Portuguese or their mixed-race descendants, called in Brazil mambucos, who went into the interior and lived among the unreduced tribes sometimes admitted, as did Pedro Bastardo in 1594, that they did so because they could have as many women as they wished.23

If contact with Amerindian peoples could lead the Portuguese to self-serving opinions that questioned the humanity of the Indians and facilitated their availability as workers or sexual partners, such contact could also lead to cultural and religious exchanges that were less exploitative. Many settlers, Portuguese and people of mixed background, penetrated into the interior and lived among the native peoples for extended periods of time. Often their intention was to trade with or to bring back Indians as workers or slaves, but while in the sertão, they lived as Indians, speaking Tupi, tattooing their bodies (which implied killing enemies and perhaps eating them), living in polygamous relationships, and generally ignoring the precepts of the Church. Like the Mediterranean renegades, they knew that to be reconciled with the Church, they had to insist that their actions and behavior had only been a strategy for survival. Their testimonies, then, give us only a fleeting glimpse of the true motivations and their real sentiments, but they reveal that some actually fought against the Portuguese, sold arms and horses to Indians, and convinced Indians not to live with the Jesuits, where they would have to surrender their way of life and forgo the honor of slaying a captive and taking a new name or the prestige of having many wives. These men found in the culture of the gentio a freedom that appealed to them, not because Amerindian cultures had no social constraints—
of course, they did—but because as men in a cultural middle ground, these transfrontiersmen found a space between cultures where the expectations on their compliance to rules were loosened.24 Such cultural sojourning was, in fact, a tradition of Portuguese expansion around the globe. The chronicler Manuel Faria e Sousa in his Asia portuguesa wrote that in Portuguese India each person lived for himself, and that to make their way "they forgot their fatherland and even their faith, dispersing themselves among our very enemies, serving them against their own nature in the hopes of getting rich."25 The lives of these people raise serious questions about the fixity of religious identities, and they open the issues of religious hybridity.

Here I can mention the strange Brazilian syncretic religious movement of Santidade among the Tupi-speakers that flourished in Jaguaripe in southern Bahia in the 1580s. Such santidades had sprung up among the coastal peoples since the 1550s. They often drew on Tupi traditions of messianic leadership by the shamans and on a belief in a "land without evil." In Jaguaripe, the movement had been influenced by the Christian concepts absorbed by Indians who had been under Jesuit care, but the movement attracted Indian slaves, those in the missions, and gentio still not converted. It combined aspects of Catholic religious practice such as a rite of baptism with indigenous ones. Its followers burned farms and sugar estates and began to carry out a war against the whites and the colonial regime. Raids and pockets of resistance continued well into the late 1620s.

That this kind of religious syncretism might develop among an Indian population that had been exposed to Jesuit attempts at conversion is no surprise, but what is perhaps stranger is the way in which the Portuguese and the mamelucos in Bahia dealt with the "heresy of the pagans." A sugar planter, Fernao Cabral, sent an expedition into the interior under the command of a mameluco, Domingos Nobre, known as Tomacauna. He and his mameluco and Indian allies lived for months among the rebels; drank, smoked, and ate with them, and finally brought them to the engenho of Cabral, where they were allowed to settle. He apparently used them as workers, but it became public knowledge that Cabral allowed them to practice their religion and even paid respect to their leaders. Cabral was a man with an already bad reputation as a blasphemer and cruel slave master, but his dealings with the Santidade created a scandal in the region. Cabral claimed that he allowed the sect to operate for convenience, with no real belief in it, and that he visited its ceremonies out of curiosity, but many mamelucos and even some Portuguese became convinced it was a real religion and true path. This was especially the case of those born in Brazil who were more familiar with and perhaps more open to indigenous ways. Luiza Rodrigues, a white girl, admitted that, in
speaking with Christian and pagan Indians, they had convinced her that “the Santidade was holy and good, and that the law of the Christians was not.” She later blamed her error on her youth. In all, twenty whites, forty-six mamelu-
cos, sixteen Indians, and seven blacks and mulattos were eventually incrimi-
nated to the Inquisition for collaborating with the Santidade movement.\textsuperscript{26} Included among them were not only marginal mamelucos, but other sugar planters and people of substance, including Cabral’s own wife.

The inquisitorial investigation of 1591–93 in Bahia dealt rather leniently with those implicated, accepting, for the most part, the renegade-style expla-
nations of outward collaboration without spiritual commitment. Perhaps the inquisitor was unable to accept the idea that these pagan “abuses” truly con-
stituted an attack on the validity of the Church in the minds of the colonists in
same way that Islam or Protestantism did. But in the forests and cane fields of
Brazil the opportunities for the old ideas of religious relativism could flourish
and could lead to real deviations. The mameluco Lázaro Aranha told a com-
panion that “there is a God of the Christians, a God of the Moors, and a God
of the gentio.” He was a man who had lived for long periods among the
Indians as an Indian and had developed a sense of relativism out of that
experience, but the framework in which he was able to place his thought was
the traditional one of implied equality of the monotheistic religions, to which
he added the beliefs of the Indians. Aranha’s friends were soldiers and sugar
technicians and other mamelucos, and with them he gambled, swore, called on
the saints, and blasphemed against them. His doubts about dogma were pro-
found, so deep in fact that at one point he questioned even the whole concept
of immortality of the soul when he stated, “The only thing in this world that is
immortal is the coal beneath the ground.”\textsuperscript{27} A half-breed Epicurean or a tropi-
cal materialist, Aranha joined the ranks of the Spanish and Portuguese doub-
ters who appeared before the Iberian tribunals accused of saying that there is
only birth and death, and all the rest is false. There was no evidence here of
Converso rationalism or the influence of Averroës, as has sometimes been
suggested as the source of such ideas. Instead, Aranha seems to have been an
irreverent man able to question the nature of the soul and even the singularity
of the Christian God.\textsuperscript{28}

The Santidade movement in southern Bahia demonstrated that the contact
of cultures could lead to new variations of old doubts and syncretism that
moved in various directions. It was simply the most extreme example of cul-
tural fusions and adaptations that led to the use of indigenous techniques of
divination to African pharmacopeia and healing rituals. This was a society
with enormous opportunities to transgress frontiers and to realize that union
of licentiousness and liberty so feared by those who wished to protect the
moral and political order.
The idea that religious exclusivity made for a more moral and a more holy society underlay the Church’s claim for singular adherence. But the idea that an individual’s freedom of conscience in matters of religion might not weaken society continued to appeal to some people. In 1612, Paulo Sonio left his native Antwerp to work in the shop of a man in the Brazilian sugar trade in Viana do Castelo. There he came into contact with New Christians who were Judaizers, and he felt compelled to confess this to the Inquisition. Nevertheless, he insisted that all men could save themselves in their own law, and he reasoned that in the absence of an Inquisition in his native Flanders, there was just as much “santidade” there as in Spain, perhaps remembering the brutal repression of the Inquisition that had operated in the Spanish Netherlands in the time of Charles V and Philip II. Another Fleming, Alberto, long resident in Bahia as a merchant, expressed the same idea in the 1590s when he was denounced for arguing that God had created the Jews, the Turks, and the Moors in their law, and thus God intended for them to be saved in that law. As in Spanish America, eventually individuals appeared in Brazil who extended the possibility of salvation even to unbaptized Indians. In Maranhão in 1696, for example, a young Carmelite novice named Florentino, who was dismissed from the order, argued that no pagan or gentile was condemned, all could be saved. All of the urgings and arguments of learned theologians and of his Carmelite mentor could not dissuade him of a truth evident to him that God had not condemned the Indians.

The theological importance of salvation as a measure of orthodoxy was not lost on the laity. People clearly understood the implications of not believing that the path to salvation lay exclusively through the Church. In June 1708, for example, Josepha da Silva Lopes denounced her husband, Paulo de Almeida Botelho, to the commissary of the Inquisition in Salvador for saying that “of all the laws that exist, God knows which is good and true.” Of course, we do not know if he actually said this, or if his wife for other reasons found the Holy Office to be an effective way to carry out her domestic argument in another sphere, but the fact that she chose this often-spoken expression to condemn him indicated her correct perception that its theological content was serious enough to cause her husband trouble, and the phrase itself common enough to be believed by the commissary.

People knew what was at stake in this matter. Take, for example, the argument that transpired between Father Manuel Americo da Costa and Captain Cosme da Silveira about 1713 in the latter’s home in Olinda. Silveira was from Paraíba and was probably a New Christian. He had come to Olinda to prevent the wedding of a daughter of his whom he had placed in the Olinda convent of Nossa Senhora da Conceição. Both men apparently liked to read. Father Costa had lent Silveira a copy of Fernão Mendes Pinto’s Peregrination, that
widely popular if perhaps fanciful account of travels in China and Japan that may have been a disguised critique of Portuguese imperialism. In discussing a brutal attack of the Portuguese on one particular people, Silveira had taken the position of religious relativism. He stated that surely these people had thought their law was true and valid, and that only God really knew for sure. Father Costa later claimed to have been shocked. He told Silveira that “only our law is firm, solid, and true, propagated by our Redeemer Jesus Christ to the Holy Apostles and Evangelists to be spread to all the world.” Here was an orthodox defense of the Church’s position. Silveira’s relativism could not be left unchallenged. Curiously, however, Father Costa only brought this incident to the attention of the Inquisition some nine years after the exchange had originally taken place. The Old Christian priest and the New Christian Silveira had been close enough to share books, and Silveira had felt comfortable enough to state the old refrain that each could be saved in his or her own law to his clerical friend.

New Christians, Old Christians, and Inquisition

The New Christians had from the inception of the colony played an active role in its development, and far from the immediate gaze of the Inquisition they had taken a prominent place in Brazilian society. Despite increasing disabilities and discrimination in the form of restrictions on their mobility, professional activities, and educational opportunities as well as the financial penalties suffered by the payments for the general pardons, the New Christians in Brazil had flourished as sugar planters, cane farmers, artisans, merchants, and clerics, some even attaining positions of municipal office or other governmental positions. Their presence cast a shadow over the colony as a whole in the minds of many observers. As late as the 1620s even the governors of Portugal during the Hapsburg period felt that the New Christians still dominated the colony and that little help could be expected from the colony’s residents.

In the face of growing hostility and of a campaign of vilification, the relations between Old and New Christians in Brazil on a daily basis were often close and amiable. One need go no further than the considerable evidence of intermarriage between the two groups. In the visit of 1591–93, the marriage partners of 158 New Christian men and 75 women were recorded. For both men and women, over half of the unions were with Old Christians (59 percent of the men and 56 percent of the women). These unions often involved sugar planters, the local aristocracy, and “men of governance,” those entitled to hold municipal office, with the daughters of well-known New Christians. Surely,
there were various reasons for these matches, such as economic considerations and family strategies, and these marriages do not necessarily imply religious toleration, but the rate of New Christian exogamy suggests a constant interaction and relatively common social contact between the two groups. One must imagine the courtships, the meetings, and the interaction of families at the weddings to grasp the level of interaction that these figures imply. Then, too, one must keep in mind that in the multiracial slave society that had formed in the colony Old and New Christians were, despite their putative differences, drawn together by the fact that both groups were white and both Portuguese, and that counted for a great deal in a colonial world of racial distinctions. New Christians had used success and whiteness to overcome the social barriers set in their path. Marriages with Old Christians could bring advantages as well, but there was always the risk that familiarity and contact with a spouse’s family might also lead to denunciations for Judaic habits or practices. That was also the situation in relation to free and slave Afro-Brazilians. Slaves knew quite well what went on behind closed doors, and some used denunciation of their New Christian masters as a strategy in their own struggle against slavery. At the same time, crypto-Jewish slave owners sometimes tried to instruct slaves and servants in Judaism and promised good treatment for keeping their secrets. The reality seems to have been that every group in society devised strategies for appropriating the power of the Inquisition to their own situation.

Certainly, the matter of religious origins was a topic of general knowledge and concern. People had a relatively clear idea of their neighbors’ and acquaintances’ religious origins, and when opportunities to use that knowledge to settle old scores or to fulfill one’s obligations to orthodoxy arose, it was used, as the denunciations to the Inquisition make clear. Nevertheless, interactions and contacts between Old and New Christians were relatively easy.

Some impression of these relationships can be gained from testimony given during the inquisitorial visits. In 1618, Antônio Mendes, an Old Christian sugar merchant, was in his shop in Bahia talking to clients and friends when one suggested that he take a loan from another man because he was an Old Christian, implying that he could be trusted. Mendes spoke out, “In the matter of business we should leave aside whether one is an Old or a New Christian, at times what is more important is to be a good Christian and a New Christian than to be a disreputable Old Christian.” It was a variation of the old saying, “Better a good Moor than a bad Christian.” On another occasion, Mendes had spoken in favor of the New Christians and later explained to the Inquisition that he did so not because they followed the law of Moses, but because some were rich and successful, they had treated him fairly, and “because they
help each other, something the Old Christians do not do, because many of them lack charity with their neighbors, whom they call infamous.”

One sees in these conversations and interactions a conviviality and indifference to religious origins and even expressions of admiration and respect despite an awareness of those differences of origins at the same time. Even in many of the denunciations made of New Christians for Judaic practices it is clear that the knowledge of peoples’ habits and practices was often derived from close personal contacts. Sometimes such contacts led to resentment, enmity, and hostility, but they could also produce friendship, attraction, and even respect. Old Christian and New Christian merchants did business together on a regular basis and formed various kinds of temporary and long-term partnerships.

Both groups also proved that at times personal advantage and conviction outweighed national identity or religious associations. There were accusations of New Christian complicity and perfidy in the Dutch attack on Bahia in 1624, and then during the Dutch occupation of northeastern Brazil from 1630 to 1654. During the era of Dutch control, in fact, a number of New Christians actually openly professed Judaism during the period in which freedom of conscience was permitted. But episcopal and inquisitorial investigations revealed that both Old and New Christians had collaborated with the Dutch, for individuals of both groups had found advantages in doing so.

*Portuguese Response to Freedom of Conscience in Dutch Brazil*

The occupation of northeastern Brazil by the Dutch West India Company, and especially the period of the government of Count Maurits of Nassau (1637–44), is sometimes presented as a kind of Camelot on the Capiberibe River, a moment when under the protection of a humanist governor, an enlightened Renaissance prince, Catholics, Protestants, and Jews were able to live in relative peace and tranquility, a peace and harmony that in its concessions to freedom of conscience and of worship exceeded even that of Amsterdam itself.

Toleration, or the multiconfessional state, was viewed by most governments at the time as a prescription for internal dissent and disloyalty. Count Maurits did not have an easy time in enforcing such a policy. He had to struggle continually against the intransigence of most of the local Calvinist ministry as well as the pressures for a less tolerant policy in the colony demanded of him by the directors of the Dutch West India Company. Moreover, he faced the
steadfast opposition to his government and the presence of the Dutch by many of the resident Catholic clergy, directed in their opposition by the bishop of Salvador, the capital of Portuguese Brazil.\textsuperscript{41}

This doctrinal opposition to Maurits’s pragmatism in matters of religion was accompanied by the use of a rhetoric of religious conflict that became increasingly a reality after Count Maurits was recalled by the West India Company and an uprising of the Portuguese residents (the War of Divine Liberation, 1645–54) broke out. The ties of political interest and religious affiliation, long present but stimulated by wartime rhetoric and propaganda after 1645, hardened along national and religious lines, and the bellicose discourse of both sides emphasized the heretical nature of their opponents, disguising to some extent a period of political and social collaboration, or at least relativism and indifference, that had preceded it.

Most studies of Dutch Brazil have explained the ideological and practical reasons for a policy of toleration as an extension of Dutch practice and interests without much explanation of why and how the Luso-Brazilian residents as well as the free Indian population participated and cooperated, at least for awhile, in this experiment in toleration. The Dutch occupation makes it possible to examine the forces among the inhabitants on the other side that led, for a time at least, to a period of collaboration and even conviviality between the Dutch and the Portuguese and to a lesser extent of the Jews, who also enjoyed a modicum of religious toleration in Dutch Brazil. In short, Dutch Brazil and the period of Maurits of Nassau offer a limited opportunity to imagine what possibilities for toleration might have existed in Portuguese society when the authority and power of the Church and especially of the Inquisition had been diminished.

Even before the arrival of Count Maurits in 1637, the West India Company had sought to neutralize Portuguese resistance by promising the Luso-Brazilian inhabitants, the \textit{moradores}, the security of their property and positive economic benefits as well as freedom of conscience and belief. This was made clear in the general outline for rule of the colony set out in 1629. The West India Company had been founded to carry out war against the king of Spain and his possessions, and although Spain and Portugal were under the same monarch, the company had targeted Brazil to some extent because it hoped the inhabitants might be less inclined to resist, given the traditional enmity between Portuguese and Castilians. Of course, Portugal was a Catholic kingdom, but Holland had been a major trading partner with Portugal since the Middle Ages and, in fact, had carried much of the early Brazilian sugar trade. Religious
differences were not seen as an insurmountable obstacle to renewed collaboration. Moreover, there were various groups in the Brazilian colony who might find advantage or benefit in cooperating with the Dutch.

After the Dutch seized Pernambuco in 1630 they immediately found that some kind of religious toleration had to be extended if the colony and its sugar economy were to function at all. Sometimes the pressures came from surprising directions. Dutch and other foreigners who acquired Brazilian sugar mills quickly learned that the slaves simply refused to work if, at the beginning of the sugar harvest, the mill and the workers were not blessed and sprinkled with holy water and an appropriate prayer said by a priest. Despite complaints by members of the Reformed Church about such idolatry, the practice was generally allowed. Portuguese sugar planters were, of course, encouraged to stay by the Dutch and urged to abandon their estates by the Portuguese because both sides knew that without sugar the colony would fail. Nassau realized that the old Portuguese planter class was a powerful and potentially dangerous element, and he hoped that eventually they might be supplanted, but he also realized that without the Portuguese cane farmers and sugar technicians, the colony could not succeed, and so he sought to keep them in place. On the other hand, despite a tradition that insisted that the Dutch had little skill or interest in sugar making, it is interesting to examine a report of the sugar mills in Dutch Brazil made in 1639. A number of the mills had been acquired by Dutch merchants or employees of the West India Company, and while some of them were absentee owners, there were others like the physician Servaes Carpentier, who became a resident senhor de engenho and remained so for the rest of his life. The 1639 report also revealed that many of the mills depended on sugarcane grown by dependent cane farmers, as was the Brazilian custom, but that Dutch and other foreigners, including merchants and men in administration of the colony, often supplied cane alongside Portuguese cane farmers. Whether the mill owners were Portuguese or Dutch, a mixed group of cane suppliers could be found on many of the sugar estates. Little is known of their relations with each other, but they certainly shared the same interests and must have seen and interacted with each other regularly. Sugar created its own logic of identity and interest between the Dutch and the Portuguese.

One gets some inkling of what that contact and possible collaboration and perhaps tolerance might have looked like from a Portuguese episcopal investigation that was carried out in 1635–37 by Dom Pedro da Silva, bishop of Salvador. Rumors of a certain degree of collaboration with the Dutch by members of the Catholic clergy in Paraíba had moved the bishop to conduct this inquiry, and as a result some eighty individuals were denounced, eight of them clergymen, twenty-four New Christians, and forty-eight Old Christians.
The New Christians, of course, were no surprise, and some of them took the opportunity offered by the Dutch invasion and the extension of religious liberty to the Jews to openly return to the Judaism of their ancestors and join their coreligionists from Europe who came to the colony. What was more surprising were the Portuguese Old Christians, both lay and cleric, who for personal or religious reasons were willing either to accept Dutch rule, were indifferent in matters of religion, or converted to the reformed religion of the Protestants.44

Some of the cases were scandalous, like that of the priest Frei Manoel “dos Oculos” Calado do Salvador, who dined and drank with the Dutch, urged his flock to accommodate to their rule, invited Calvinist ministers to his home, and became a confidant of Count Maurits. He was a man who changed sides with ease and skill, and his later account from a pro-Portuguese perspective is still invaluable.45 There was also the case of the infamous former Jesuit missionary Manuel de Moraes, who fully went over to the Dutch, using his linguistic skills in Tupi to turn the indigenous peoples under his care to the Dutch side.46 Many local Portuguese claimed he had given the invaders considerable help with a sword in his hand, giving up the cloth and later marrying in Holland. The kind of daily interchange that emerges from the denunciations reveals many reasons for collaboration or a willingness to get along. Perhaps most famous of all was João Fernandes Vieira, the later hero of the Portuguese restoration of Brazil. Vieira, a man of humble origins from Madeira, had arrived in Brazil with few prospects. He had originally resisted the Dutch invasion, but he provided self-interested help to the high councillor, Jacob Stachhouwer, who then used Vieira as his agent and clerk. Together, based on their “tight friendship,” they made a fortune. Vieira eventually owned fifteen sugar mills and by 1637 was joining with other Portuguese, both New and Old Christians, to complain to the West India Company that any plan for a monopoly of trade would be a violation of the promises they had received of “greater liberties not only in justice and religion, but also in the development of our business and capital.” Vieira became a confidant of Count Maurits and one of the colony’s wealthiest men. His collaboration and success earned him the enmity and jealousy of many, but eventually his decision to side with the rebellion seems to have been made when the West India Company began to demand that the Portuguese planters pay their loans to the company. Vieira held the largest debt, and he had good financial reasons to resist payment even though he eventually couched his resistance in terms of loyalty to Portugal and detestation of heresy.47

Despite all of the efforts of the Catholic clergy, there were many marriages between the Portuguese and Dutch. Domingos Ribeiro had married three of
his daughters to Dutchmen, apparently in Protestant marriages, and when someone questioned him about it, he was reported to have said that the Dutch were better Christians than the Portuguese. In another instance in Igarassú, two girls, called the Pimentinhas, the nieces of a man called Pimenta had married Dutchmen, their elders defending the match by saying that “a Fleming is worth more than many Portuguese,” a paraphrase of the old Iberian saying, “Better a good Moor than a bad Christian.”

These unions were frequent not only in Pernambuco, but elsewhere in Dutch Brazil. In Rio Grande do Norte, many Dutchmen married Portuguese widows, and Father Antônio Vieira reported from Maranhão in 1642 that not only were there marriages, but also that Portuguese men and women were accepting “the customs and even the rituals of the Dutch.”48 Some of the Dutch, like Gaspar van der Ley, who married Portuguese women became Catholics while others, like Jan Wijnants of Haarlem, a senhor de engenho who married a planter’s daughter from Goiana, remained Calvinist. One of the daughters of Mateus da Costa of Ipojuca married a New Christian who became a Jew, while another married a Dutch Protestant.49 But the number of these unions was enough to cause the concern of both the Protestant and the Catholic clergy, for such marriages always implied a certain insecurity of national and religious identities. After the outbreak of hostilities in 1645, a number of locally married Hollanders joined the rebel cause, and some enlisted in the eight companies of former employees of the West India Company (most of them French and other Catholics) who joined the Luso-Brazilian forces.

Marriages between Portuguese women and Dutch soldiers, New Christians consorting with openly practicing Jews in Recife, the circulation of prohibited books, friendships, business contacts, attendance at Calvinist churches. All of these actions were denounced and reported in the Portuguese episcopal investigation of behavior in occupied Brazil prior to the arrival of Maurits of Nassau, but with his arrival in 1637, despite his personal reservations about Catholics and Jews, the policy of toleration was vigorously enforced and the opportunities for contact increased.50 There continued to be tensions and sometimes scuffles over the use of churches, religious processions, and the other moments of public contact between Catholics, Protestants, and Jews. Despite considerable opposition, however, Nassau extended the guarantees of freedom of conscience to all and sought to incorporate local Portuguese, even clerics, into his confidence.51

An excellent opportunity to do so came after the Portuguese restoration of 1640 made Holland and Portugal allies against Philip IV of Spain. To celebrate the new situation in April 1641, Count Maurits organized a great spectacle in
Recife with horse races and equestrian competitions in which Portuguese and Dutch gentlemen paraded together and competed for the cheers and favors of the ladies as well as for various prizes.\textsuperscript{52} The era of goodwill did not last long. Dutch refusal to abandon the Brazilian colony, the Dutch attack on Luanda in 1641, the withdrawal of Count Maurits, and new demands on the West India Company’s debtors, all contributed to increasing hostility between the Portuguese and the Dutch which grew from primarily political and economic considerations. Maurits, however, remained an example of what was possible to achieve by toleration, and because of that a danger. A multiconfessional society was a threat. Doña Margarida, the vicereine of Portugal, warned in 1639 that the faith of the settlers and converted Indians of Brazil was imperiled by contact with the Dutch enemy and that “carried by private interests and relations they might leave (God forbid) the Holy Faith and separate from the purity of the Christian religion.”\textsuperscript{53}

In fact, even after 1641, while relations improved, the number of conversions was small, but Portuguese appreciation for Nassau’s religious and commercial policies was great. Moradores, Indians, and blacks cried at his departure. Portuguese settlers still referred to him as “our Saint Anthony,” and years later, in 1647, after Maurits had gone back to Europe, the very possibility of his returning to Brazil was enough to make Portuguese policy makers afraid that he might undercut the rebellion by attracting the inhabitants of Brazil to his side once again.\textsuperscript{54} The joint inducements of liberty of trade and liberty of conscience posed a real threat. The Portuguese ambassador in Amsterdam even floated the idea of sending Nassau back as governor of Portuguese Brazil (despite the problem of his Calvinism), such was the depth of his popularity in the colony.

Once the War of Divine Liberation had begun, the rhetoric of confessional animosity and national loyalties set the parameters of behavior again and were later adopted in a nationalist historiography.\textsuperscript{55} Under ecclesiastical urgings from pulpits and on the battlefield, Luso-Brazilian forces and leaders meted out particularly harsh punishments to Catholic converts, black or Native American allies of the Dutch, and especially to New Christians, who were looked upon as heretics and turncoats. The terminology of orthodoxy and heresy became the mold into which the war was poured, and so it becomes virtually impossible to separate the strands of economic, political, and religious motivation and justification in the struggle.

But the use of the language and concepts of religious intolerance was not uncontested. When Recife fell on 28 January 1654, the Portuguese commander, Francisco Barreto, treated the vanquished Dutch with all the courtesies of war, abiding by the surrender agreement and enforcing strict control
of his troops to prevent abuses. Even more impressive was his treatment of the remaining Jewish community. Despite the objections of the Inquisition, he allowed them to depart unharmed and to sell their property, and he even helped to provide adequate shipping for their voyage. Surely, said the Jewish chronicler Saul Levy Mortara, God had saved his people by influencing the “heart of Governor Barreto.”

While the experiment in tolerance had taken place in Dutch Brazil, the forces of orthodoxy in Portuguese Brazil had felt highly threatened by the shadows of apostasy and heresy. In 1645, the Inquisition ordered a major investigation in Bahia, choosing as its agent for the task a special investigator, the Jesuit Manoel Fernandes. It also depended on the bishop of Salvador, dom Pedro da Silva, and above all on the governor-general, Antônio Teles da Silva, both of whom were closely tied to the Inquisition, the latter being, in fact, the principal architect of this new tightening of the reins. They hoped that a large-scale investigation, “the Great Inquiry [Grande Inquirição],” would bring under control the disorder of spiritual life in the colony, a place where “scandalous license” reigned. The historian Anita Novinsky has written an excellent analysis of this inquest, in which 118 people were denounced for various sins from sodomy to blasphemy, but 73 percent of those accused were New Christians, many of them from prominent Bahian families of merchants and sugar planters. In that sense, the inquest followed the traditional pattern of the Portuguese Inquisition.

Certainly the vast majority of people in Bahia had no admiration for Judaism and had absorbed the discourse of denigration that had demonized Jews for a century. Then, too, there was a war in Brazil in which Jews were allied with the Protestant Dutch invaders, but many of those people called to testify offered imprecise, secondhand information filled with rumor and imagined practices, often dating from years before. All of the traditional affronts of Judaizing New Christians were reported, the whipping of crucifixes, the disrespect of the saints, the secret meetings. But even more important, many Old Christians refused to come forward to denounce New Christians and sought to be excused from deposing. The governor had to take serious measures to force their participation.

**Syncretism and Dissidence in a Slave Society**

The divisions between Old and New Christians remained an element of important social distinction in colonial Brazil, but they eventually became secondary in the face of the growing presence of large numbers of African slaves and their descendants. Africans brought with them elements of culture
and religions, and these combined with the beliefs and practices that the Portuguese had transferred, including many folk practices or devotions that the clergy held to be superstitious, unseemly, or heterodox. That African beliefs and practices were widely distributed among the population, both black and white, is borne out by a variety of sources and by various denunciations before the Portuguese Inquisition. The diffusion of these beliefs had taken place since the arrival of Africans in Portugal in the fifteenth century, but in the context of Brazilian slave society various aspects of African practices had become common, not only among the slaves and their descendants, but among the society as a whole. The result was a considerable social and religious ambiguity and fluidity.58

African practices took a number of forms but most popular, or at least the most challenging to Portuguese cultural hegemony, seem to have been the calundus, or religious ceremonies accompanied by African religious practices of spirit possession.59 These gatherings included drumming and dancing that brought the participants into a state of trance. Orthodox thinking associated these dances with demonic possession. The first literary mention of them is made by Nuno Marques Pereira in his Peregrino da America (1722), in which he saw them as hellish rites accompanied by the sound of African instruments.60 But if the slaves sought respite from their burdens and the healing of illness in these dances, it was not their fault. Marques Pereira placed the onus of slavery’s legacy on the masters, not the slaves. As he said, “It is certain that the master makes the slave, not the slave, the master.” And went on, “O State of Brazil, how I fear the great punishment that will come because of the bad government that many of your inhabitants practice with their slaves and families.”61

While Marques Pereira was the first to publish about the calundus, the phenomenon was already well known in the colony and already a concern to the Church by the time he wrote. Traces of these practices had been suggested in the early seventeenth-century inquisitorial visit, but by the last decades of that century references to them were common. In a text of 1702, Father Francisco de Lima, who worked as a missionary in the Bahian Recôncavo, reported that in the parish of São Gonçalo a black woman named Magdalena was in the habit of publicly dancing the calundu. Father Lima was upset because he considered these to be diabolical dances in that they led to trances and visions among the participants, who at times were left speechless and almost moribund by the dance. These meetings and dances were, in his mind, work of the devil, who had been able to penetrate the community because of other spiritual failures. Father Lima complained that it was widely held that the local priest of the parish was rumored to be a New Christian and was not living up to his responsibilities. Lima was scandalized that during the feast of Our Lady
of the Assumption celebrated by a mulatto brotherhood, its juiza, or leader, was a colored woman named Rosa, who also happened to be the mistress of the New Christian priest’s brother. She was apparently responsible for a number of heretical propositions as well, but despite that fact, both the priest and his brother protected her from prosecution. Father Lima was convinced the devil was in the heads of these pardos (mulattoes) and blacks and that the danger and the calundus were spreading.62

While the Portuguese white colonists viewed the calundus as an African practice, the attractions these ritual dances seemed to offer proved appealing to them as well. At first, slave owners had turned to calundus as a way to heal their bondsmen, and even some clerics supported them in this, apparently taking these practices to be a form of natural magic and therefore permissible, but over time, as the appeal of these rites began to grow among the white population as well, they were condemned as superstitious or demonic. António Fernandes da Cruz, a bachelor who lived near the docks of Salvador in the parish of Nossa Senhora da Conceição, told the commissary of the Inquisition that he had been lead astray to participate in these rites quite by chance. On his way to visit the farm of a friend the previous Christmas he happened to pass by the home in Itapagipe of Lucrecia Vicenza, a free black woman from Angola. Hearing the drumming and the dancing, he had entered the house, “carried there by curiosity.”63 Asking what was happening, he was told by the black men and women that were there that “they danced hundus, which was the custom in their land, and that they were able to cure illnesses and spells.” He was told that if he paid and participated he might be cured of any ills that afflicted him. His participation in the calundu, despite his lame defense, revealed that these African practices were known and that the rest of the population also took part in them. Priests complained of the popularity of calundus for whites as well as blacks. Despite the efforts of crown and clergy, this syncretism proliferated over time. By the eighteenth century, as the Brazilian colony and slavery expanded into the gold mining regions of Minas Gerais and as the city of Rio de Janeiro grew in size and importance, the practice of calundus and related rites and activities also spread, favored to some extent by slave owners who saw these practices as a way of satisfying slaves’ spiritual needs, but also supported perhaps by an implicit acceptance of their possible efficacy.64

The spread of African practices may have been based on a perception of their effectiveness, but they undoubtedly were also attractive because they paralleled the group of beliefs in sympathetic magic and the occult that were widely held in Portugal itself. Inquisitors imposed the framework of sorcery, witchcraft, and superstition on these references available to them, but the
existence of a belief in alternate channels to the supernatural outside of the institutional Church or parallel to it was already well established in the colonial population, and it made the adherence to new forms of African and Amerindian origin that much easier. The occult offered a series of alternative beliefs and possibly effective means to achieve beneficial ends that seemed to many people equal or similar to the power of relics, the utility of prayer, the intervention of the saints, or the benefit of clerical blessing. People sought out and gave respect to those who mastered the techniques and knowledge of either orthodox Catholicism or of these alternative systems of belief. In this world of the occult, of astrology, love potions, calundus, and prognostication by dream interpretation, the casting of cowrie shells and the finding of objects by the “trick of the basket” Catholic authorities saw either superstition or the devil, but many people remained convinced of their effectiveness and at least unsure that they were, in fact, evil or wrong.

That insecurity created an atmosphere of tolerance in the sense that these alternate approaches might be joined to, or even replace, the orthodoxy of the Church, and people resisted attempts by Church authorities to impose orthodoxy. The colony was rife with heterodox opinion, supposed superstitions, and critiques of religious authority, especially of the Inquisition. Some clerics believed that the New Christian attitudes that had been in the colony since its beginnings prepared the religious soil for the weeds of heresy.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century, Bahia, with its layer of New Christian elites and its sea of free and enslaved Africans and their descendants, seemed to be a locale of great spiritual danger, or, as the commissioner of the Inquisition, Fray Rodrigo de São Pedro, put it, a place where witchcraft, sorcery, and superstition went from height to height. He noted, for example, the popularity of a slave sorceress called Mother Catherina, who had a great following of people and who was allowed to live outside her owners’ control, a situation not that uncommon in urban Salvador. She was said to invoke the devil during her dances, called, he said, in the language of Angola, calundus. She had so bewitched her master that his wife and daughter lived in a promiscuous manner, and the master himself sometimes fell so deeply asleep in a chair that only shaking and moving him could make him awake. These were all symptoms of social disorder and the inversion of accepted practices and thus almost prima facie evidence of demonic presence.

In the mind of Fray Rodrigo, the presence of these African practices and of superstition in general was linked to a widespread climate of disrespect for orthodoxy and the Holy Office, a direct result of the “multitude of New Christians that live in this land.” To document this disrespect, he reported an incident that had taken place during Lent in 1704. In Salvador’s Benedictine
A black sorcerer, or feiticeiro.
Magic and sorcery in Brazil combined elements from Portuguese, African, and Native American traditions, so that boundaries of culture, race, and belief were often crossed. Watercolor by Jean Baptiste Debret. Courtesy of Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.
monastery, Frei Ruperto, a serious Benedictine friar and an advisor to the Inquisition, had been preaching on the Sundays of Lent on the theme of the Vanities of Brazil or, more specifically, of Bahia. His message of “vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas” (vanity of vanities and all is vanity) (Ecclesiastes 1.2) had so offended the listeners that they had begun to compose satirical doggerel against his sermons and against his person, accusing him of being a drunk. From the pulpit he warned that he knew exactly who was sending him the offensive verses but with apparently little effect in promoting any respect for him or his office. When Frei Rodrigo denounced supposed revelations by a street healer’s superstitious inventions, her defenders told his companion Frei Alberto that Frei Rodrigo must be drunk to say such things. Frei Alberto defended his colleague and told the critics to be careful of what they said, for Frei Rodrigo did not drink and he was a commissioner of the Holy Office of the Inquisition. His critics seemed unimpressed by the gravity of his office. “A commissioner of shit,” was the answer thrown back in Frei Alberto’s face.69

Frei Rodrigo’s letter reveals a situation in which the status of unbelief in Bahia and by extension Brazil reflected the social composition of the colony as well as its religious origins. There were disrespectful New Christians who scoffed at the teachings of the Church and denounced its attempt to instill orthodoxy.70 It was the kind of criticism certainly not limited to New Christians. Even more troubling for the defenders of orthodoxy was the defiance inherent in alternative practices. African rites or beliefs, perhaps most common in the form of calundus, indigenous practices, and pharmacopeias, and the Portuguese traditions of faith healing, divination, sorcery, magic, and dream interpretation combined to create what learned men perceived as a superstitious society, but also one that was profoundly religious. The Church’s own emphasis on the power of prayer or of the saints to combat evil or the devil reinforced belief in the effectiveness of these inversions of true belief.

If alternate and effective ways to influence the supernatural existed, then the possibility of alternate or parallel paths to the divine was also possible. In such an environment the traditional arguments that a merciful God could save whomever he chose, or that those who lived according to natural law even if unbaptized could be saved, or that God had given each person his or her own destiny to fulfill could flourish. And there were always doubts. In 1699, Antônio Duro, who lived with his wife and children in Porto Calvo in southern Pernambuco, a man, it was said, of “bad habits,” argued that he did not believe in hell, where souls were eternally damned, for God’s purpose was to save everyone, and if there was some place for souls to go, then the time there would be limited and “God would take them from there by his good will.”71 This was an idea similar to that held by Pedro de Rates Hennequin, who was
sentenced in 1744 for a series of heretical ideas and strange propositions. Hennequim had lived in the mining zones of Minas Gerais and had become convinced that Brazil was the location of an earthly paradise and of messianic expectation. He liked to read the Bible himself and to interpret it as God had revealed it to him. When others spoke ill of the Jews, Hennequim had said, “What harm have they ever done me?” He predicted that in a few years the whole world would be united into “one flock beneath one shepherd” and that the ten lost tribes of Israel would be gathered from all over the Americas, where they had gone into exile. But the principal reason for his denunciation was that he had often said that all those who went to hell would ultimately be saved, “for God had not created any soul in order for it to be lost.”

When questioned then why purgatory existed, he had responded that God had many houses, drawing as his text of justification John 14:2, “In domo patris mei mansiones multae sunt” (In my Father’s house are many mansions). Hennequim wished to read his Bible in his own way and to link its message to a millenarian perception of Brazil and to a sense of toleration in which all souls would eventually find salvation in the hands of a benevolent God.

People like Hennequim who mixed orthodox and heterodox or heretical theology or who were able to accept the Church’s teachings while still deeply involved in a universe of spells, magic, and incantations were common. The case of an itinerant Brazilian, Sebastião Damil e Sotomaior, demonstrates this clearly. He had been born and raised, as he told the Inquisitors, in Rio de Janeiro “of Portugal” about 1665 to Old Christian parents. Baptized, confirmed, and a regular participant in the sacraments of the Church, he knew his prayers and Christian obligations well. He was literate, having received his first letters in Brazil, and had lived on his father’s rural estate, probably a sugar plantation, until at age thirty-two he had sailed to Angola. From there he had gone in an English vessel to Jamaica, where he remained for three months before arriving in Cartagena de Indias on a slave ship. He settled there, working as an estate manager (mayordomo de estancias), a job for which apparently his rural experience in Brazil served him well. But he was a man who did not keep his opinions to himself, and because he was a foreigner, his listeners were unwilling to turn a deaf ear to his deviations from dogma. Eight people gave witness against him, noting his bad habits, his avoidance of church attendance, and his strange ideas. Denounced, Damil e Sotomaior was arrested for expressing a number of suspicious opinions, but he refused to admit anything; after three audiences with the inquisitors, however, he began to discuss the propositions that had caused his arrest.

The trouble had started in April 1699, when, in a conversation about a recent earthquake in Lima, someone had said that such events had divine causes since not a leaf on a tree moved without God’s will. Damil disagreed.
He stated that God had no power over the elements, and when, for example, the sea swallowed a ship it was not God's will but simply the force of the elements. After the creation of the world, Damil told the inquisitors, God had conceded his power to the elements, the sun, the planets, and the stars, and these things and each person operated through their own will. Someone else in the conversation had complained of his unhappy married life and said that his miserable marriage had been God's will, to which Damil had said their union was not God's will but that of the unhappy man himself since we all have free will in all we do. God had ceded much to nature. God did not create the plants and animals. The plants were created by the sun, and animals, just like mosquitoes and frogs, were created from the putrefaction of the earth. Here he was advocating the ancient idea of spontaneous generation, the creation of living things from inanimate objects, a belief that could be traced back to Aristotle and Lucretius and that had remained part of the understanding of the physical world of many, although exactly in this period that belief was under scrutiny. Where had he learned these things? In this case, unlike so many others, he was able to inform the inquisitors, he had not read them in a book but had learned them from a Jesuit in Rio de Janeiro named Simão de Vasconcelos. This was not just any informant. Vasconcelos was a prominent, well-read Jesuit who wrote about his order in Brazil and who represented in many ways the Jesuit attempt to reconcile scholasticism with observation and doubt. He was also a man with some curious ideas about the edenic character of Brazil, and if we can believe Damil, some unorthodox interpretations of dogma.

But if Damil e Sotomaior emphasized individual freedom of will and seemed to be a proto-deist in some ways, he was also clearly mixing these seemingly secularizing or "modern" ideas with a bundle of folk superstitions and practices and an understanding of dogma at variance with the Church's teachings. He believed, for example, that Christ had not been carried in Mary's womb for nine months, for he could not believe that in those "nauseous entrails [bascosidades] God would be incarnated. Mary had remained a virgin after the birth because God was all-powerful, and Christ had been conceived when Saint Gabriel had placed three drops of blood in the heart of the Virgin. He also did not believe in devils or in hell. Devils, he claimed, were simply Christians who had died. The inquisitors wished to know more. Had he really questioned the existence of hell? Damil was too smart to admit that. He explained that when in a conversation about St. Patrick's visit to hell someone had argued that the souls there were being punished with razors and chains, he had said that it only appeared so because the souls were only spirit and had no body to suffer such torments.

As his defense before the inquisitors developed, Damil was not reluctant to
admit that he knew certain prayers (salmos) that could kill snakes, iguanas, and worms or that could cure people. He was what the Portuguese called a benzedeiros or a salvador, a popular healer. He had learned his craft from various sources. He knew a prayer to cure fevers; another to stop bleeding. He recited in Latin a prayer against the plague that he had been taught by a Portuguese priest named Mota in Rio de Janeiro. One had been taught to him in Rio de Janeiro by an old woman, another by a black man. Another he admitted having read in a book entitled Thesouro de prudentes (The Treasure of the Prudent). This was a very popular almanac filled with information on the tides, the stages of the moon, eclipses, and other curiosities and natural phenomena. First published in 1612, it went through at least eight editions over the course of the next century.

By word of mouth and from popular sources Damil had enriched his repertoire of prayers, mixing orthodox devotion and magic. The prayers themselves were filled with references to the saints, to Jesus, and to the Virgin, but their intention was to affect the world through natural magic. Deism and magical spells: his cosmology had contradictions, but he seemed comfortable with them. In the end, neither his explanations nor his plea for pardon helped him. The Inquisition seized all his property in 1699, and he was sentenced to perpetual prison at the king's oars.

Here at the dawn of a new century Damil was mixing orthodox theology with heterodox and heretical beliefs and with folk practices of the occult. Like many of these folk practitioners, he was a man who had traveled and seen the world and who had developed his own cosmology. He saw no conflict in his mixture of Catholic belief and natural magic. By the eighteenth century such ideas were under attack by a new rationalism even within the Inquisition that emphasized a more scientific approach to healing. Some men and women went even further than Damil's deviations. They were skeptical of all religion and willing to build the basis of community on other criteria. In Brazil, as elsewhere in the Atlantic world, their numbers were growing by the eighteenth century.