

Jesuit Missionary Writers and the Recalcitrant "Other" in 17th-century Amazonia

Between 1630 and 1730, most native communities of the Amazon Valley were visited by Spaniards and Portuguese offering trade goods of great practical value and urging adherence to their Christian faith. In exchange, they wanted the Indians' forest products and their labor for profitable enterprise. The native Amazonians, quick to appreciate the Europeans' tools, weapons, cloth and distilled beverages, gave them at first a generally hospitable reception. They provided cheerfully for the foreigners' needs, assisted them freely with adventurous undertakings, listened politely to their preachments, only occasionally showed signs of distrust. Most were slow to see danger in the European presence; and as a result their resistance to colonialism was too little, too fragmented and too late to guarantee their survival.

The white men unwittingly introduced epidemic diseases that wreaked havoc in the Indian communities they struck, often killing most of their inhabitants within a few weeks' time. Then, rather than rushing assistance to them, they kidnapped the survivors and carried them into slavery in places far from home. Where armed resistance was eventually offered, they slaughtered men, women and children indiscriminately, burning their villages as if determined to leave no trace. Their trade goods themselves proved troublesome -- transforming work and recreation in welcome ways, but also creating dependence, unsettling social relations and providing the occasion for fratricidal wars. Finally, the foreigners offered the battered and bewildered

Amazonians a dubious refuge in mission villages, where they might attempt to reconstruct their lives as forced laborers under the stern "temporal and spiritual" administration of Jesuit, Franciscan, Calced Carmelite or Mercedarian priests.

In these hard times the more buoyant Amazonian peoples managed a tenuous survival by accepting their "reduction" and eventual assimilation into a back-country peasantry. Most did not fare so well. By the mid-18th century, hundreds of thousands had died premature deaths or been reduced to chronic poverty and marginality under, or in preparation for, Portuguese and Spanish colonial rule. Several tribes had ceased to exist; most had experienced severe depopulation and wrenching cultural transformation. Those still intact lived so far from the river transportation routes as not yet to have been visited by white men or their Indian allies.¹

Key agents in this process of destruction and partial reconstruction were the missionary priests to whom both colonial governments assigned responsibility for "domesticating" their Amazon Indian subjects. Of these the Jesuits worked longest with the largest numbers of people; and on this frontier as elsewhere in America, it was they who left the most extensive record of their activities. The "Jesuit Relations" for the Amazon valley are hundreds of detailed and informative letters and chronicles written in Spanish and Portuguese. Most remain unpublished or in rare book collections today, and had limited circulation outside the Jesuit residences of South America before the 20th century. Referring as they do to a region which is still largely unpeopled and has attracted few historians, they have been less used for historical purposes than, for example, those of the "black robes" of Paraguay, French Canada or the Mexican Northwest. But these documents are as rich as other Jesuit records in material for the social, cultural and institutional history of a frontier region during the "long century" of its incorporation into the modern world system.

The "Jesuit Relations" for Maynas and Pará.

Jesuit missions to Amazonia began in the second quarter of the 17th century, when Spaniards of the Quito Province entered the Maynas region of the upper valley and Portuguese from Brazil went to the lower valley or Pará. Indians from many tribes were gathered into two rapidly extending chains of mission villages, as each province sought to extend its theocratic realm into the heartland of South America. Transportation between Maynas and Peru was so laborious as to make exports uneconomical from the western sector. Few Peruvians settled on that frontier; the economy was focussed on subsistence; and Maynas remained an almost exclusive preserve of the regular clergy until the "rubber boom" of the late 19th century. Small numbers of missionaries worked closely there with the few Peruvian soldiers sent to enforce their authority; they governed the province, and organized a labor regime for its Indian inhabitants, as they saw fit.

Portuguese settlers had expelled Dutch traders from Pará and nearby Maranhão early in the 17th century, and sought first to become Brazilian-style sugar planters employing Indian rather than African slaves to do their work. When planting failed, they had been obliged to take their living from the collection by Indian forced laborers of cacao, vanilla, sarsaparilla and other forest products for export. The economy of Pará therefore relied more completely and for a longer period of time on Indian slavery than that of any other colonial territory in the Americas. Jesuits there were assigned by the King to administer the Indian mission villages as an alternative to slavery, and provide Indian wage laborers from them to the settlers as needed -- while at the same time supervising and imposing legal standards upon an official government-sponsored slave trade. Their relationship to their "charges" was therefore quite different from that of the Jesuits in Maynas.²

The main work of the missionaries in both provinces, however, was to "domesticate" the Amazonian Indians by "reducing" them from their natural state of freedom to the status of docile Christian laborers and vassals of Iberian kings, resident in permanent settlements under missionary administration. This was a

challenging assignment. Freeborn Indians were often enough driven by their sufferings to resettle in Jesuit missions in search of some respite from the holocaust of war, epidemics and enslavement. But they found life harsh there, and they generally resisted the program of domestication at least by passive means, for as long as they could. Their children, raised in the mission environment, might prove somewhat more malleable. But frustration for the missionary was built into this system; and exasperation with their intractable "flocks" was to be a central theme in Jesuit writings.

Our words "mission," "conversion" and "evangelization" do not represent this colonial "domestication" process accurately. The purpose of these missions was not primarily to seek a religious reorientation among the Indians. To convert, or "find God" and change direction in life, was an active not a passive experience -- something an Indian might do, but which could not be done to him. The mission was in any case not a propitious environment for such an expression of free choice. To evangelize was to carry "good news" of liberation to those seen as oppressed by the burden of their ignorance and sin. Jesuit missionaries did see their work as a sacrifice indispensable for the Indians' "salvation," as well as for the consolidation of empire; they did imagine the unfettered natural condition of the Indians as a kind of Satanic oppression. But none of them wrote joyfully of conversion, "good news" or "liberation" in the 17th-century chronicles of these missions. The gift they bore was a stern doctrine to be accepted without question -- that of their God, their civilization and their new socioeconomic order. The response they expected was neither spiritual rebirth nor a whole-minded embracing of new ideals by Indians. It was obedience, docility, and hard work for low wages -- in anticipation of a heavenly reward.

The texts examined here are six of the more accessible and representative early Jesuit communications from Amazonia. Three were written by Spanish missionaries (one of these a native of Popayán in New Granada and one a German from Bohemia), three by Portuguese (one a Luxemberger). Two represent experiences of the mid-17th, two of the late 17th and two of the early

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18th centuries.³ Some reference will also be made, for purposes of elaboration, to Portuguese Jesuit accounts of the mid-18th century -- the period of "enlightenment," with a changed consciousness for Jesuits as well as colonial administrators, when Indian slavery and the missions themselves were on their way to abolition. All of these authors except Acuña (whose book is really a travel account) were veteran missionaries; they wrote from personal observation, that of their contemporaries and the letters of predecessors kept in the archives of both provinces. Their reports are therefore rich primary sources for social as well as institutional history, though limited in several respects as materials for Indian history in particular. Most are primarily concerned with the hardships and accomplishments of the Jesuit missionaries themselves; none attempts a history or an ethnographic description of an Indian people. Few suggest, indeed, that their authors were in the habit of observing Indians closely. The native Amazonians are more backdrop than subject in the stories these writers have to tell. Nevertheless, the relationship between Indians & missionaries is a central theme of colonial Amazonian history; and these Jesuit relations are the best sources we have for exploring it.

In reviewing these works for the present discussion I have focussed attention on the often oblique and fragmentary observations they make about the salient traits and moral character of Amazonian Indians, seeking to identify patterns in these representations. A second concern has been to suggest how such "significations" of the "other" may have influenced the practical behavior of Jesuit missionaries towards Indians. For convenience, the summary will focus on the key questions (for 17th-century Europeans) of the Indians' humanity, their capacity, their barbarity, their polity, their religiosity, and their docility.

Humanity.

As Catholics and missionary priests, the Jesuits of Amazonia subscribed in principle to the doctrine enunciated by Pope Paul III in the bull *Sublimis Deus* of 1537, that the Native Americans were rational human beings, susceptible to enlightenment by the grace of God and capable of participation in the

sacraments of the Church. They were therefore free by nature, responsible for their actions, and subject to both human and divine law. Manoel da Nóbrega, the Jesuit founder in Brazil, had addressed this question directly in 1557 (amidst bitter controversy) by explaining the Indians' stubborn resistance to evangelization as a rational response to observed European behavior, taking a firm stand in favor of their humanity and arguing against their enslavement by Europeans.⁴ Doubts on the fundamental point of the Indians' humanity were nevertheless as persistent among the settlers of Amazonia as they had been in Nóbrega's time; and they were often enough entertained by the missionaries themselves, when Indians proved uncooperative with their program of domestication or were found (or rumored) to engage in such "inhuman" practices as cannibalism, infanticide or incest. (Sodomy, a familiar charge elsewhere, is seldom mentioned in Amazon Jesuit accounts.)

In the 17th-century European view, "barbarous" behavior placed the Indians at a low place on the Great Chain of Being from the animal up through the savage and civilized to the Godly, which humans might ascend through good works or descend through sin.⁵ Cultural similarity to Europeans was tantamount to virtue; difference was suggestive of sin. The Amazonian Indians, seen through this glass, were so different from Europeans as to make it indeed difficult accept them as fully human fellow beings. These were creatures who wrought no implements of metal, had very little knowledge even of stone. They subsisted by fishing, hunting, gathering wild plants and practicing a shifting horticulture rather than proper agriculture. They went about naked like animals, ate a great many things (such as larvae found under rotting logs) that Europeans saw as inedible. Não fazem distinção de mãe a filha ("they make no distinction between mothers and daughters ") was the oft-repeated formula for referring to their imagined sexual propensities. Newly captured slaves were frequently referred to as indios de corda, people thought to have been kept tied up in pens to be fattened for cannibal feasts until "rescued" by the slave traders of Pará. Such notions helped keep the humanity of the Indians open to debate, though the missionaries for their part were obliged to keep their own doubts at least

partially in check. Mission itself was inconceivable (and indefensible to the royal exchequer on which it depended for subsidies), if its objects were deemed incapable of salvation! Jesuit writers therefore generally affirmed the Indians' humanity on principle, but did so often in the very passages which expressed their uncertainty about it.

Exasperated by the difficulty of domesticating the Indians of Maynas in his day, Francisco de Figueroa wrote of

the torment of struggling with animated logs or irrational men. That is what the Indians raised in these forests generally are, seeming like savages, wild men, brutes in human form and humans who act like brutes.

This was especially evident, he thought, in their bizarre notion of music. Some of them could indeed be taught to sing words and play the flute reasonably well; but left to their own devices, the music most of them made was nothing but an imitation of birds, monkeys and other animals!⁶

The conviction that Indians were human must not be understood as an expression of solidarity, of belief in the potential for a transcultural "fellowship in Christ" between missionaries and Indians viewed as equals in the eyes of God. The Amazon valley was not the civilized China or India of the "rites controversy" of that day, nor yet the realm of the imperial Aztecs or the Incas. Jesuit discourse in Amazonia consistently held the Indians and their cultures in very low esteem. It was customary, for example, to refer to them in correspondence as peças ("pieces") or pretos ("blacks"), employing the jargon of the African slave trade. Comparisons of Indians to wild animals abound in both Spanish and Portuguese sources; and the verb domar, "to break" or "to tame" as with horses, is commonly employed to describe the missionary's relationship to them. Indians other than chiefs are seldom referred to by name; and there is no suggestion of friendship arising even from long association between Jesuits and individual Indian persons. No Jesuit writer acknowledges having learned anything of

importance from an Indian, or expresses appreciation for an Indian contribution to the emerging regional culture. Missionaries were "shepherds," "fathers," spiritual guides and administrators in the patriarchal society they sought to establish in Amazonia; they had their own answers to every important question, and the virtues they occasionally imputed to members of their "flocks" were those of children, followers and servants.

Antonio Vieira, founder of the Jesuit province of Pará, sought in his letters and sermons to establish the principles for a proper administration of the Indians there -- peoples about whom he had concluded a short time after arriving that their "simplicity" required a shortened catechism, and that their languages were impossible for any civilized person to learn. Vieira's writings of this period constitute a rhetorically magnificent defense of the Indians against their unrestricted exploitation by the Portuguese settlers; and they were so highly regarded in their own day as to influence royal legislation for Pará. (One result is that he is sometimes remembered as an opponent of Indian slavery, though his principal contribution to Amazonian history was to devise the tropa de resgate system through which tens of thousands were enslaved under close Jesuit supervision.) But Vieira has in fact very little to say about Indians, or even about their human rights, in these denunciatory texts; it is clear to a careful reader that they were the occasion for his eloquent discourse on their behalf, not its subject. The Indians' role as anonymous canoemen and cooks, hewers of wood and bearers of water to the settlers of Pará is taken for granted; their involuntary hard work as slaves or at "ridiculously" low wages is noted but not lamented. Vieira makes no reference to their legally established right to live free of Portuguese domination if they chose; and he purveys without apology the conventional myth that Indians were cannibals, as when he intones that a Portuguese conquest is needed "to save the Indians from being killed and eaten." Vieira's towering figure set the tone for subsequent Jesuit thought and action in Pará, and in it may be seen the ambivalence that characterized even the most vigorous Jesuit defense of the Amazon Indians' humanity.

Domingos de Araujo complained that the question of whether the Indians were or were not human, long since resolved in theology and canon law, continued as a topic for lively debate in the society of early 18th-century Pará. Despite the generally acknowledged handsomeness of the Native Amazonians, there were those still who found them "only apparently human, an imitation of rational beings, and really a kind of monster born of monkeys with human appearance." This, as João Daniel would argue as well years later, was nothing but a rationalization of the Paraenses' custom of "killing them like mosquitos and exploiting them like beasts of burden." It had never prevented the settlers from making shameless use of Indian women to satisfy their lust, which under the first premise would have made them all guilty of the sin of bestiality! Araujo contended that since perfection and beauty were "God's alone, and ugliness and brutality could always be found in one's self," the denigrators of Indians should examine themselves before judging others.⁷

Araujo reviewed the reasons alleged since the days of the conquest of Hispaniola to argue that Indians were subhuman and might therefore, like cattle, be used as the Europeans saw fit -- even to the extent of feeding their dogs with the meat of Indians killed for that purpose. He found the best answer to this un-Christian allegation in a letter written in 1536 by Bishop Julián Garcés of Tlaxcala to Pope Paul III as he was gathering opinions in preparation for *Sublimis Deus*. Garcés had argued for the humanity of the Indians by describing the accomplishments of the several hundred noble Aztecs who were studying with distinction in the Mexican convent schools of his day. These boys were less noisy, fractious, prideful or injurious to one another than European schoolboys. They were even-tempered, shy, disciplined, truthful, obedient to their teachers, mutually helpful, uncomplaining, generous, modest, moderate in all things; and they were dextrous, sharp-minded, good at singing and at reading, writing, painting and sculpting. "What conscience is so cauterized, what mind so shameless," Garcés had argued, "as to dare judge a people so capable of the mechanical arts to be incapable of the Faith?" Once conquered by Europeans, the Indians had proved no less human than the ancient Spanish barbarians in their

encounter with the civilized Romans; and they were no less capable of being tamed by the Faith. Garces' defense of the Indians' humanity had been based, in short, on the intelligence, austerity and humble obedience which joined together to help make them good Christians.

All of this, concluded Araujo, was applicable to the Indians of Pará -- save the part about literacy and scholarship since, given the work schedule in the Jesuit missions, there had never been occasion to teach any of them Latin and the liberal arts. But for all their virtues and potential, the Indians of Amazonia continued to be treated by the settlers like beasts of burden. They were unjustly enslaved, forced to carry healthy men and women on their backs or in litters over long distances, subjected to every kind of physical and verbal abuse. That some still in the forests might retain such barbarous customs as cannibalism was no excuse for treating those already domesticated as subhuman. The refusal to recognize the Indians' humanity in everyday practice had no basis in Christian principles and could only be attributed to the settlers' boundless greed.⁸

Capacity.

Araujo acknowledged that the mental abilities of the Amazonians had been little explored by the missionaries of Pará, nor were they likely to be so long as these people, slave or free, were obliged to be absent from their villages during six months or more of each year, serving as crewmen in the settlers' canoes. Missionary efforts to teach Indians to read and write had been perfunctory at best, even where children were borrowed or kidnapped from their parents to raise as the Jesuits saw fit. The few who had ever been taught to read had learned quickly; but the labor system had given them little opportunity and no incentive to continue learning. Nevertheless, barely trained Indians could be heard singing very well at the mission religious services. Araujo wondered whether if Indian boys were taught Latin, there might not one day be Indian priests in Pará! This, it must be made clear, was an exceptional flight of fancy; in no other Jesuit source of the period was the possibility of the creation of a native clergy so much as suggested.

The place where the mental abilities of the Indians could most readily be seen, observed Araujo, was in the readiness with which they learned any sort of manual art. There were fine Indian barbers, blood-letters (including some women), blacksmiths, sawyers, carpenters, stonemasons, painters and sculptors in Para. In fact, it was they who did most of the skilled as well as the unskilled work of the colony. Perhaps the most impressive of their skills was the construction of enormous, well-proportioned long-distance sailing canoes from a single trunk -- vessels which they would outfit so well with seats and superstructure that "the King himself could travel about in style." The women of Pará painted gourds for dipping water and serving food which were so beautiful, useful and durable that there was a small export market for them in Europe and Brazil; the same would undoubtedly be true of their beautifully woven hammocks if they could but be known and used abroad. The Indian men, for their part, supplied the local markets of Pará with a remarkable variety of fine baskets and mats for household use. Other Jesuit writers also found occasion to comment upon the manual skills of the Indians as manifest in their arts and crafts, in the production of tools and weapons, in hunting, fishing, building and canoe handling. Several noted the quickness with which they learned new skills from the Europeans.⁹ The Indians of Amazonia by no means appear to be a dull-witted lot in these sources, except when they are cudgeling their brains (or failing to do so) with the mysteries of Christian doctrine.

Nevertheless, only Araujo found them capable of rational thought; and it is curious that in doing so he based himself on the reflections of the 16th-century Bishop of Tlaxcala rather than on any Amazonian experience. Why was this? In part, the answer must lie with the European notion of thought as the work of gentlemen. The Aztec schoolboys had been of noble birth (a point little emphasized by Araujo); but in Europe itself as well as America, neither women nor the working poor were deemed rational by well-bred men; and the Indian men of Amazonia were far from qualifying as noble. There was, moreover, very little occasion for the discussion of ideas between Europeans and Indians in the social world of Pará. Generally speaking, neither group knew the other's

language nor understood the other's main concerns. One was dominant in every realm of interaction and exempt by law and social custom from manual labor or physical punishment. The other was subordinate in every realm, dedicated exclusively to manual labor and frequently flogged. Communication was in the Tupian mission pidgin lingua geral, a second language for virtually all its speakers during the period in question, and one about which we may speculate (in view of its history and functions in colonial society) that it was a vehicle of very limited range for the expression of ideas. The work of exploring the thought-worlds of Amazonian Indians was therefore left to 20th-century ethnographers, observers who arrived much too late on the scene to examine most of the works of the intellect which may once have graced the region. For 17th-century Jesuits, the working premise was that of Francisco de Figueroa: "These are people little given to governing themselves by reason."¹⁰

The discourse of the Jesuits of Amazonia on Indian capacity stands in curious contrast to that of their French contemporaries among the fur-trading Algonquians of Canada. These missionaries were less dominant and more dependent in relationship to their "charges," involved as they were in the construction of a great forest trading network in which Indian slavery, the "domestication" of Indians and violence itself played a relatively small part. "Conversion" to Christianity was accomplished there less by force than by persuasion, which in turn required the close observation of Indian ways; and it was a consequence of this *modus operandi* that the French relations contained more information about Indians than the Spanish and Portuguese ones. One searches in vain in the Amazonian relations for a note such as this one:

The majority of [the Indians] are not at all malicious, but liberal, have a good mind and a clear one so far as discerning common and sensible matters, deducing their reasons with gracefulness, always employing some pleasing comparison. They have a very good memory for material matters, such as having seen you, or the

qualities of place where they have been, or what one did in their presence some twenty or thirty years ago.¹¹

The administrators of "domestic" forced laborers were unlikely to discern quite so carefully the thought processes, or speculate upon the indigenous values, of the essentially servile neophytes under their care.

Polity.

Europeans everywhere in tropical America were disappointed by the degree of political development, the política or polícia they found in Indian societies. As the standard phrase had it, não tem fe, nem lei, nem rei -- they had neither state religion, codified law nor duly constituted authority. Such people seemed to live in a state of complete and untrammelled "natural liberty," giving free rein to their base impulses and unrestrained by any discipline. In Amazonia they had no cities or temples; they lived in only temporary housing; they wore little or no clothing; they accumulated no more surplus than they could consume or distribute through trade; they appeared to concern themselves exclusively with here-and-now material affairs, ignoring the spiritual and transcendental. Jesuits in particular, imbued as they were with the ideals of civilization as virtue and social order as disciplined hierarchy, found it difficult to take such societies seriously.

Francisco de Figueroa remarked of the Indians of the Rio Huallaga valley among whom he had worked, that

though they have always dwelt in villages as they did when the Spaniards found them, and for that reason might be expected to have more polity than others who lived scattered in isolation from one another, they seem to have achieved little or nothing in the way of political order.

There were a few scattered signs of civil order. The Cocama dressed in colorful cotton clothing, whereas the other tribes went naked. Most Indians knew enough to band together in organized fashion for both offense and defense in times of war. Living in villages helped them to organize the drinking, dancing and singing festivals of which they were so fond. But in other respects, they

did not live as in the company of human beings. There was no government. Each one did what he had a mind to, and travelled wherever he liked; when they committed some crime or evil deed there was no one to punish them, and the chiefs had no authority for anything.

On the Rio Ucayale, he had met some

so-called chiefs (for they had no dominion nor people subjected to them as to a lord whom they served), and all the chiefs I met were of the same ilk.

If one person offended another in such a society, it was the victim himself who took vengeance.

This lack of policia made it difficult to get people to work under the missionary supervision, or attend mass regularly, even by flogging. They seemed impermeable, in fact, to any [European] sense of justice. The truth was that a great deal of patience, tolerance and persistence was required to "break and indoctrinate so indomitable a people." Figueroa believed that the Jesuits would have accomplished a great deal more in Maynas, had they not been faced with "such pernicious inbred customs and lack of subjection, blocking their desire to be Christians." In the circumstances, it was remarkable that the mission Indians had at length acquired as much "doctrine and policia" as they had done under Jesuit guidance, and were learning to "obey their superiors and accept the punishment for any crime or disobedience." Local government and police officials had been appointed for them, and there were "jails in which those who

deserve it are locked up." Everyone in the mission stations by now wore clothing, attended Mass, participated in religious processions and the sacraments, and took his turn working to provide sustenance for the missionary priest. But this regime could never have been accomplished, acknowledged Figueroa, without the help of auxiliary armed forces,

because the very brutality and the customs beyond reason in which these Indians are raised, cry out for a justice which can govern, correct and repress them.

Their chiefs could not provide this tonic; but when outside force was brought to play, and the

brutality and crudeness of customs, the lack of teaching and the ignorance of everything righteous, reasonable and conducive to the health of their souls

was remedied, these people were quite capable of becoming good Christians.¹²

The natives' lack of interest in clothing was seen by the Jesuits as a clear sign of the lack of disciplined polity; and it was a permanent subject of concern. Nudity titillated some and was studiously avoided by others, a source of discomfort sternly reprovved by all. Betendorf visited the chieftainess Moaçara in Maranhão, travelling with some Europeans who had dressed elaborately as a means of establishing authority among the savages. Moaçara and her retainers came down to the riverbank to meet them

entirely naked...only she wore a short covering woven of palm leaves, tied behind her back... [then] a hideous hag passed her hand across my face, smiling to herself and saying 'hee hee hee' as if to indicate 'what a handsome one.' I ignored this barbarous courtesy and followed Moaçara to her giant palm-thatched longhouse... In the middle she had placed a small mat on which she sat with two

young girls, her nieces, inviting me to sit beside her. I begged forgiveness, alleging the infirmities of age.

His Jesuit companion accepted the honor in order to avoid giving offense, but "sat on the mat as far from her as possible."¹³

Bento da Fonseca, a leading Jesuit of mid-18th century Pará, wrote more harshly of the Indians' lack of polity. It was impossible, he thought, to preach the Gospel to Native Americans in the way it might be preached to any "political and articulate" people who could be convinced by an appeal to reason. Here it was necessary first to convince people of the material benefits that might accrue from domestication: living freely together in villages, working only for wages, being protected by their missionaries from the settlers' efforts to enslave them or take away their women and children. The Indians of Amazonia were "more barbarous and brutish than any people yet discovered in the world," and experience had shown that what was required was "first to convert them from beasts into men, and then from men into Christians." This last formula (which appears over and over in Jesuit sources) expressed the practical need to

remove them from the forest and establish them in villages where, thanks to regular communication with the missionaries and civilized Indians, they could become accustomed to life in organized society.

The natives must learn to see the missionaries as their fathers, and as their defenders against the violence and exploitation of the Portuguese. This was why the Kings of Portugal and Spain had granted the Jesuits both temporal and spiritual administration of the Indian missions; one could not be effective without the other. Mission was indispensable for "reducing" peoples to whom "nature did not give the ability or talent for governing themselves;" and it must be accounted a miracle of Divine Grace that people as barbarous as they, "brought up without any law, not even the law of nature," sometimes indeed decided to

leave home and embrace a law and king they did not know, a way of life so different from their own.¹⁴

By contrast with this deprecation, Jesuits in the process of "reducing" a people with the collaboration of their leaders were sometimes more favorably impressed by Indian polity, and inclined to endow chieftainship with more authority and hierarchy than it perhaps actually possessed. Writing of the mission to the "Iririzes" at the mouth of the Rio Madeira, Betendorf alluded admiringly to their system of governance. When the supreme chief died, the Irurizes elected the best qualified among their principaes or leaders to succeed him. The chiefs might have several wives and many children (a custom objectionable in principle, but impressive nevertheless as an indication of power!); and they exercised a great measure of authority over their followers. Those of the five larger Iruriz villages, moreover, had "vassals" living in smaller settlements nearby to work their manioc gardens.

Betendorf describes two "state visits" to the Iruriz village which served as mission headquarters, by neighboring chiefs with large companies of their followers. These arrived in great fleets of canoes just as evening fell, and were obliged by protocol to remain in their vessels until permission to land was granted on the following morning. Then a solemn procession of armed and painted men, sometimes bearing gifts, would proceed from the canoe landing towards the village with the chief and his principal warriors drawing up in the rear -- they with battle insignia and he with an unsheathed sword (presumably obtained through trade with the Europeans) raised on high. The Iruriz chief and his warriors would march out in full array to meet them, exchange greetings and invite them to the great house of ceremonies in the center of the village. There they drank, danced and inhaled the hallucinogenic paricá in a celebration that might continue for several days. During this time the Iruriz women were sequestered to prevent fraternization; but when the visit was over, the chief would allow them to emerge and accompany their men to see the visitors off! In

one of these descriptions, Betendorf even has the visiting chief's principal followers accompanied by groups of armed "vassals" or "pages" as bodyguards.¹⁵

This effort to endow Indian polity with the accoutrements of power, authority and social stratification was anticipated in Acuña's observation that the Omagua were the "most intelligent and best governed" of any tribe he encountered on the Amazon -- a fact which he could only attribute to their having been influenced indirectly by the Spaniards! The Omagua went about fully clothed and even had colored cloth to sell; they were "so obedient to their principal chiefs, that a single word is sufficient to make them perform whatever they are ordered to do." This was the Jesuits' ideal; but there is little in the historical or ethnographic record to suggest that it was any Amazonian Indian's ideal. Figueroa's observations on polity along the Huallaga and Ucayale were perhaps closer to the mark.

Barbarity.

A sure sign for Christians of the barbarity of the Amazonian Indians was their tolerance of the widespread practice of infanticide. There are several accounts in which the missionary learns that a mother has buried her newborn baby alive, and arrives to dig it up and administer the last rites just in time to save the infant's soul from purgatory.¹⁶ Figueroa noted with equanimity the common practice of burying deformed babies, to produce an adult population free of handicaps to join in the struggle for subsistence. But he was sharply critical of the widespread practice "worse than the beasts" of killing babies born out of wedlock, or (he thought) to avoid the trouble of raising them, by burying the unwanted infants alive with their afterbirths. "For this reason the Indians are

few." On the other hand, he was quick to note that when Indians did decide to raise a child "they showered too much love upon it!"¹⁷

Even more damning and widely influential was the perennial charge of cannibalism. Acuña had heard from the slave-raiders of Pará with whom he travelled that the Omagua took captives in war "so as to eat them in their drinking bouts." Skeptical, he guessed that the story had been "invented by the Portuguese to give color to their injustice." Two Indians of Pará who had been captured by the Omagua, lived with them for eight months and accompanied their war parties, explained to him that their captors had never eaten their prisoners, but that they killed the "principal and most valiant" to prevent their escaping and returning later to take revenge. Then they would throw their bodies into the river and preserve their heads as trophies. Acuña acknowledged that there might be cannibals in Amazonia, but was at pains to assure his readers that

the flesh of Indians is not to be found in every public meat market, as those declare who, on pretence of preventing like cruelty, make slaves of those Indians who are born free."¹⁸

In Maynas, where the slave trade was of no economic importance and Jesuits were not charged with legitimizing it, the Indians to whom cannibalism was imputed were those who resisted missionization. Figueroa recalled with horror the Mayoruna of the Ucayale valley (some of whom, settled in a mission, had thrown over the traces and returned to the forests after their first bout with smallpox), who ate the flesh of their own dead. When a loved one passed on they would begin their lamentations, and

sobbing, cut him into pieces, eating those they preferred as fresh meat boiled or roasted, smoking the rest to eat later...and burning the bones to grind into powder and drink with their native wines. They kept the heads until the brains filled with maggots, then ate them with gusto, mixed with hot peppers.¹⁹

Those who made most use of the myth of cannibalism were the Portuguese settlers, for the reason that Acuña had divined. And like Vieira, most Portuguese Jesuit writers gave it some credence. Betendorf recounted the story told by the Christian Irurizes that their enemies the Jaquezes liked nothing better than to eat the flesh of Iruriz women. They would hunt them and bring their bodies home like those of wild animals, to dividing the fresh meat among their neighbors. By contrast, the Arawaks living north of the mouth of the Madeira (whose vigorous resistance to enslavement had earned them the grudging respect of the Portuguese) seemed less savage than valiant. They did not eat human flesh, reported Betendorf; "and if they kill their prisoners in ceremonies it is only to assert victory and acquire a name."²⁰

Writing after the abolition of the slave trade and expulsion of the Jesuits of Pará, the normally sober and informative João Daniel painted a salacious picture of the cannibalism of some unspecified Amazonian tapuyas (undomesticated Indians) -- people whom he regarded as inferior to the wild beasts, since the beasts would die before eating one of their own species. These barbarians would save the fatter prisoners for their banquets and the young girls for sexual abuse, "unless they have good bacon on them, in which case not even their beauty will save them from dying like calves." Imagining the ceremonies for the sacrifice of these prisoners, he had them facing death "like brutes without any feelings...as if it were a children's game or a piece of theater." It was in order to rescue the Indians from such treatment, he explained, that the colonial government and the Jesuits had instituted Vieira's tropas de resgate several decades before.²¹ In reading this story, it becomes clear that the subject is not observed custom but official myth. The preservation of that myth was as important to the Jesuit collaborators in the Indian slave trade as it had been to the slavers themselves. Too seldom was there introduced into this discussion the caution of Domingos de Araujo, who wrote that though some Amazonian people might so cruel as to eat human flesh, "I have often heard it said, but never by anyone who claimed to have seen it."

For the 17th-century Jesuit missionaries Satan was a tangible presence; and Indian religious beliefs and practices were clear signs of the Devil's work. Mission might lead them into hand-to-hand combat with the Demon. Samuel Fritz reported of the Yurimagua on the middle Amazon in about 1690 that

an evil spirit was exercising such despotic dominion over them, that from time to time he suddenly fell upon them and beat them cruelly.

Fritz erected a cross in the village, and announced that with its assistance, the spirit would have less power. Then one night he heard a flute being played at a ritual deep in the forest, that "caused me so great terror, that I could not endure its sound." Asking about it, he learned that

they were playing in this manner to Guaricaya, that was the Devil, who from the time of their ancestors came in visible form, and took up his abode in their villages; and they always made him a house apart from the village within the forest, and there they brought him drink and the sick that he might cure them.

The exasperated missionary asked what this Devil looked like, and was told that he could not be described but took different horrific forms, but that when he came "all the women with their little ones flee" leaving only the adult males, whereupon "the Devil takes a whip [and] flogs us on the breast until much blood is drawn to make us valiant." Fritz wondered whether this fearsome individual might have been urging them to get rid of their missionary, but was reassured to learn that the sounds the demon made were inarticulate -- and that in any event since the erection of the cross he had been unwilling to approach the village or even to cure the sick that were taken to his house in the forest.²² Reading this account today, one is startled to realize that Fritz did not see this Yurimagua shaman as a diabolical human colleague or competitor, one whose

magic he would have to find some way to discredit. He saw him as the Devil incarnate. Later he reports having heard similar tales about Lucifer's work among the Aisuares and other peoples of the same region.

João Daniel's Indians knew and feared the Devil, and even expected him at their drinking festivals, "where he is often seen dancing among them." They said that he was very ugly, that he appeared regularly at certain lakes and clearings in the forest, which the Indians avoided, and that they obeyed his orders either out of fear or in hopes that he would reveal secrets to them. . The Jesuits' first Amazonian catechism, Daniel recalled, had inquired into dancing as a way to get at people's acquaintance with the Satan; and the children, ever quick to say what they had seen and heard, had sometimes reported to their missionaries having seen him dance at their parents' festivals. Another diabolic manifestation was the curupira sprite who appeared to people in the forests and manioc gardens as a nude human figure with a shaved head, and who helped them find whatever they were looking for. A loud booming sound coming from the forest was attributed to curupiras; and cacao-collecting crews would follow such sounds believing they would lead them to well-laden trees. In this way, observed Daniel, Satan kept in touch even with the domesticated Indians; how much more easily must he have controlled them in their natural state! The Devil, it sometimes seemed, was better known to mission Indians, and more "feared, known and obeyed" by them than the Christian god himself "who can cast us into Hell in the other world or annihilate us in this." It was this that had so often made Indians deaf to the missionaries' preaching of the mysteries of the Faith, and to their obligations as Catholics. Betendorf's Irurizes, even after accepting Christianity, remained convinced that the demons would harm them "if they did not pay annual tributes in wine and manioc cakes at their festivals."²³

One bane of the missionary's existence was the "Devil's ground," a clearing in the forest somewhere not too distant from the village in which the Indians held these subversive dances and drinking bouts. At festival time, the women would carry great jars of wine out to them, and then everyone would

squat down and cover their eyes so as not to see, and their witchdoctors would talk in loud and hoarse voices, persuading them that this was the voice of the Devil, who could make them think whatever he chose."²⁴

For the urbane Cristóbal de Acuña, however, a sorcerer was simply a sorcerer; and Satan's role was less spectacular. The Indians, he wrote,

all hold their sorcerers in very great estimation, not so much on account of the love they bear them, as for the dread in which they always live of the harm they are able to do to them. These sorcerers usually have a house where they practice their superstitious rites, and speak to the demon.

On one occasion he recalled having observed a twisted expression of this Indian frame of mind: a man unable to recognize any "power or deity" in his own people's idols, had "declared himself the god of that land." Acuña's party learned of him and sent word that they would visit him with a God more powerful than he. When they arrived, "eager to know the new God, he came out in person to ask for him." But as it turned out no argument could persuade him of the existence of the True God, because he could see him. So the shaman

remained in in his blindness, making himself out to be a child of the sun, whither he declared he went every night, the better to arrange for the government of the following day. Such was the malice and pride of this Indian.²⁵

Docility.

Early Jesuit writers in both Maynas and Para made a functional distinction between indios bravos (the untamed) and indios mansos (the domesticated). The authors of our texts had, for the most part, very little experience of the former and extensive experience of the latter. Generally, their observations regarding the Indian character may be taken as reflections upon the observed

behavior of the domestic Indians which were deeply influenced by the impressions of the ways of the untamed Indians which they had gathered from frontier folklore and from their own experiences in the slave trade. Given the context, and the main goal of domestication, it is no surprise that the traits of most interest to Jesuits were those that might lead the Indians meekly to accept the "yoke of Christ." Domingos de Araujo found the domestic Indians of Pará to be

peaceful, meek, agreeable, hospitable, kindly, greatly inclined to do good for others, submissive, slow to take offense at the many indignities they suffer, for the most part disinclined to vengeance... notably moderate, content with very little; with a cloth to cover themselves and a bit of farinha to eat they don't ask for more. If there is no food, they can go for days without eating; and when there is food they will eat once to last for several days. They can enjoy abundance or endure penury... They love to rest, but when it is time to work they work hard and can endure a great deal. They are not ambitious, and even with regard to the payment for their own hard work ... they are content with little. The thing they criticize most in the Europeans is their excessive greed. They neither love life nor fear death, and generally die in the same calm way they have lived. To sum up, those who are Christians are good Christians if they are allowed to be; and those who are not have a great disposition for it if the impediments to their conversion are removed.

This may be read today as a declaration of triumph over barbarity, an announcement that in captivity the Indians' spirit had indeed been "broken." Figueroa had boasted that the missionized Xeberos of Maynas were now well schooled in "politica y doctrina" -- whereas previously they had done nothing but drink and dance and shrink the heads of their neighbors, living without restraint according to their savage customs. By the time of his writing, they actually

enjoyed wearing their Peruvian-style clothing, and praying and receiving the sacraments. On Sundays before vespers they might ask permission to do a bit of drinking; but they never drank to excess. "One almost never sees a Xebero fallen down and senseless from drink." So complete was their subjection that they would request license from the Padre even to go fishing, or to gather turtles and forest fruits in their season. Another group was so exemplary in its discipline that though they lived primarily by hunting, they would put down their blowguns and subsist on fish and forest plants alone during Lent.

Working with missionized Indians nevertheless had its frustrations, complained Figueroa, because even with an interpreter "we don't understand them and they don't understand us," which sometimes made the Indians seem unbelievably dull. "Often in confession they will simply repeat whatever you say to them, even the questions," which raised questions for a conscientious priest about the validity of the exercise. But it was worth the effort to get beyond this, he maintained,

because beneath that rough bark they are good wood; within their brutish actions there is often a docile, meek and humble nature which lacks only teaching by one who can carve into it the form and being of men.

With patience and by the grace of God, people who had once never gotten together without killing and eating each other could be brought to live in peace and harmony. But the Indians did not seek communion with the Lord of their own volition, admitted Figueroa. They had to be obliged to it.²⁶

Conclusions.

The Jesuit discourse on the Indians of Amazonia which we have been sampling is not the "colonial discourse" of European intellectual history; it is that of colonialism itself. Its "other" is no abstraction; he is the sullen, abject but recalcitrant object of direct supervision and exploitation ("domestication") by the Jesuit author himself. One striking feature of this discourse on observed reality

is its curiously archaic tone. This is not the conventional language of Iberian colonial conquest, derived from centuries of struggle against the civilized Moor; it is an older language, that of the Jesuits' reading in the classics about barbarians on the Roman frontier. These Indians are Cicero's silvestres homines -- irrational, disorderly, stupid, filthy, untamed peoples prone by nature to the furor barbaricus, assimilable into civil society only as slaves under the dominium of civilized men. The Jesuits' New Testament Christianity does not render them more lovable. Their rigorous intellectual training does not make them more knowable. Neither the humane transcendence of city, nation, class and ethnicity with which the early Church imagined a "fellowship in Christ," nor the humanist theocratic utopianism through which the Franciscan pioneers imagined the new church of 16th-century Mexico, can be found the Jesuits' vision of the society they were attempting to build in Amazonia. Their Christianity is triumphalist. They are as comfortable in the exercise of their key role in the subjugation of peoples as were the Carolingian missionaries to the north and east of Europe; they are as complacent about the destruction of peoples as were the first Castilian missionaries to the Canaries and the West Indies. Their methods are archaic as well: "conversion" of chiefs by means of threat and bribery, as a means of subjugating their followers; mass baptism rather than individual indoctrination; wholesale abolition of pagan rituals and destruction of idols; conversion of neophytes into a dependent labor force; physical punishment for the backsliders. The emphasis in such missionary work was on power rather than love; on authority, obedience & punishment rather than friendly persuasion. The missionary was the loyal, paid representative of the "principalities and powers;" his hope for the propagation of the Faith was based entirely upon the consolidation of Christian dominion, and it neither idealized this dominion nor looked beyond it to a brighter future.²⁷

The Indian in these Jesuit relations is therefore not, by and large, the real Indian of the Jesuits' practical experience. The commitment to power joined with ethnocentrism in these writers to blind the sharpest eye and hobble the keenest intelligence, in the possession of the saintlest and most self-sacrificing of men,

for purposes of expounding upon the character of native Amazonia. Indians living outside the mission system were seldom visited; they remained the objects of suspicion and systematic disinformation. The absence of a lively curiosity about the unknown Indian peoples of the forests is an especially striking feature of these accounts. On the other hand, Indians who had entered into the toils of domestication and must indeed have been well known to their pastors, seem in their writings never to have merited sympathetic observation as thinking and sentient beings. The Jesuits were careful enough reporters of their own "good works," and of the behavior of Indians as it affected them directly. They observed keenly a few aspects of the process of Indian assimilation over which they presided; but generally speaking they saw the Indian "other" only with great difficulty, as through a dark glass and as mass rather than as community of individual personalities, "souls" or believers. The result is that despite decades of experience among the Indians of Amazonia, they are able to tell us very little about them.

Why, we may reasonably ask, were these well-schooled servants of the Christian monarchs unable to see more clearly the other human beings among whom they spent their lives. Why did they fail to discover in the viable communitas of native Amazonia an invitation to friendly coexistence, to the creation of koinonia rather than holocaust in the American tropics? Why did they respond to hospitality with demands of obedience and threats of punishment? Why did they fail to see the opportunity to train the more gifted and cooperative Indian boys to serve as priests to new Indian congregations; why did they refuse to share authority with wise chiefs and shamans in the administration of their theocratic realm? How was the behavior of men seeking to live in imitatio christi rendered so un-Christlike by colonialism? Scholarly reflection on the "clash of culture" in America has been uncomfortable with such questions, blending as they do the moral concern with the scientific. We prefer to take the 17th-century consciousness as a given, and attribute the presently unconscionable to it with complacency. But the Jesuits' encounter with the viable and sustainable way of life which they found so unacceptable in Amazonia is of a

piece with every life-destroying encounter between power and the "other" in our own time. To understand such transactions, and learn to move beyond them, is to question the premises and the perceptions, as well as the praxis of power.

Notes

¹Background observations based primarily on David Sweet, "A Rich Realm of Nature Destroyed: The Middle Amazon Valley, 1640-1750" (unpub. PhD. Wisconsin, 1974). Cf. sections on Amazonia in general histories of colonial Brazil, esp. Robert Southey, History of Brazil (London, 1822, repr. 1969), Francisco Adolfo de Varnhagen, História geral do Brasil (9th complete ed., São Paulo, 1975) & Charles R. Boxer, The Golden Age of Brazil (Berkeley, 1964).

²On Jesuits of Maynas see relevant sections in vols. 4-7 of Antonio Astráin, SJ, Historia de la Compañía de Jesús en la Asistencia de España (7 vols; Madrid, 1902-25) and José Jouanen, SJ, Historia de la Compañía de Jesús en la antigua Provincia de Quito (2 vols.; Quito, 1941-43). On those of Pará, João Lúcio de Azevedo, Os jesuitas no Grão Pará, suas missões e a colonização (Coimbra, 1930); vols. 3 & 4 of Serafim Leite, SJ, História da Companhia de Jesús no Brasil (Lisboa/Rio de Janeiro, 1938-50); Mathias Kiemen, OFM, The Indian Policy of Portugal in the Amazon Region, 1614-1693 (Washington, 1953); Dauril Alden, "Black Robes vs. White Settlers: The Struggle for 'Freedom of the Indians' in Colonial Brazil," in Howard Peckham & Charles Gibson (eds.) Attitudes of Colonial Powers Toward the American Indian (Salt Lake, 1969), pp. 19-45.

³ Cristóbal de Acuña, SJ, Nuevo descubrimiento del gran río de las Amazonas [1641] (mod. eds. Madrid, 1891 & Buenos Aires, 1946; English version in Clements Markham (ed.) Expeditions into the Valley of the Amazons (Hakluyt Society no. 24; London, 1859); Francisco de Figueroa, SJ, Relación de las misiones de la Compañía de Jesús en el país de los maynas [1660] (Colección de libros y docs. referentes a la historia de America, Vol. 1; Madrid, 1904); Samuel Fritz, SJ, Journal of the Travels and Labours of...in the River of the Amazons between 1686 and 1723 (Hakluyt Society, 2nd ser. 51; London, 1922); António Vieira, "Sermão do primeiro domingo da Quaresma, 1653", pub. in Afranio Peixoto, Vieira brasileiro vol. 1 (Paris, 1921), pp. 203-21; partial English trans. in E. Bradford Burns (ed.) A Documentary History of Brazil (NY, 1966); João Felipe Betendorf, Crônica da missão dos padres da Companhia de Jesús no Estado do Maranhão [1697], first pub. as special issue of Revista do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro 72,1 (1910); Domingos de Araujo, SJ, [Memorial...(title unknown), 1720]. Excerpt from chap. 12 pub. as footnote in Alexandre de Melo Moraes, Corographia histórica, cronográfica, genealógica, nobiliária e política do Império do Brasil II (vol. 3; Rio de Janeiro, 1860), pp. 293n-311n.

⁴ On Sublimis Deus see Lewis Hanke, "Pope Paul III and the American Indians," Harvard Theological Review 30 (1937):65-102. Manuel da Nóbrega, Diálogo sobre a conversão do gentio (ed. Serafim Leite SJ; Lisboa, 1954); cf. Fred Gillette Sturm, "Estes tem alma como nós? Manuel da Nóbrega's view of the Brazilian Indians," in Hower & Preto-Rodas (eds.) Empire in Transition (Gainesville, 1985), pp. 72-82.

5 Cf. Cornelius Jaenen, Friend or Foe: Aspects of French-American Cultural Contact in the 16th and 17th Centuries (NY, 1976), chap. 1.

⁶ Figueroa, p. 229.

⁷ João Daniel, Tesouro descoberto no Rio Amazonas [ca. 1760] (pub. as special issue of Anais da Biblioteca Nacional 95; 2 vols.; Rio de Janeiro, 1976) I, p. 195; Araujo, pp. 293-94.

⁸ Araujo, p. 298. For the Latin text of Garcés, see Fredi Chiappelli (ed.) First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old I (Berkeley, 1976), pp. 375-89.

⁹ Araujo, pp. 300-305. Cf. Figueroa, pp. 206-10 & 233.

¹⁰ Figueroa, p. 107.

¹¹ Pierre d'Avity, cited in Jaenen, p. 25.

¹² Figueroa pp. 81-84, 106-08, 179-81.

¹³ Betendorf, p. 510.

¹⁴ Fonseca, "Notícia do governo temporal dos indios [1755]" in Moraes, Corographia IV, pp. 122-86.

¹⁵ Betendorf, pp. 463-65.

¹⁶ e.g. Bartolomeu Rodrigues to Jacinto de Carvalho (Tupinambaranas, 2 may 1714) pub. in Leite, História III, pp. 393-400.

¹⁷ Figueroa, pp. 240-41.

¹⁸ Acuña, chap. 52.

¹⁹ Figueroa, p. 260.

²⁰ Betendorf, pp. 233 & 355.

²¹ Daniel I, pp. 225-28.

²² Fritz, pp. 61-62; cf. Daniel I, pp. 248-50.

²³ Daniel I, p. 240; Betendorf, p. 465.

²⁴ Betendorf, p. 170.

²⁵ Acuña, chaps. 41-42.

²⁶ Figueroa, pp. 67-71 & 94-95.

²⁷ cf. Richard E. Sullivan, "The Carolingian Missionary & the Pagan," Speculum 28 (1953):705-40, and W.R. Jones, "The Image of the Barbarian in Medieval Europe," Comparative Studies in Society & History 13 (1971):376-407.