

A Rich Past and an Uncertain Future: Jesuit and Enlightenment in the Luso-American Region

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Jesuits, Enlightenment and Luso-American World

Is the decline, and then suppression of the Society of Jesus related to Enlightenment, and, if so, in which sense? The classical response has been positive, mainly because of the anticlerical characteristics of Enlightenment, which takes for granted the backwardness of the Jesuits as an obstacle to the desired modernization of the nation state in countries where the presence of the Society of Jesus was strong.

Through the readings and research I have completed to date on the subject, I believe that it is possible to challenge this simplistic view. Of course, I do not intend to argue that there is no relation between the decline of the Jesuits in the second half of the eighteenth century and the new form of western modernity, usually called Enlightenment. My broad intent have been to question some traditional assumptions on the theme in order to better comprehend how it could be that precisely in the places where the presence, and the persecution of the Jesuits was most intense, the Catholic culture, or even the Catholic Church - of which the Jesuits were the most representative Order -, managed to survive throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This was the case of the Iberian Countries, particularly Portugal, and its American colony Brazil.

I argue against the supposed dichotomy between Enlightened Portuguese thinkers and backwards Jesuits as representing assimilation versus refusal of the enlightened ideas. Actually enlightenment ideas were assimilated among different branches of the Catholic Church - usually considered away from Enlightenment, an anticlerical movement in its foundations - in different ways. They were all attempting to accommodate some enlightened ideas to the Catholic background recurring to different eclectic strategies: prioritizing either the power the State and the King or that of the Pope. Because the Iberian Countries had been very close to the papacy since their birth as countries in the sixteenth century, the situation became particularly complex in the eighteenth, when those links were deeply questioned by Don José I in Portugal and Charles III in Spain.

In this paper, I am approaching the influence of enlightenment ideas in Portugal and Brazil through the discussion of the issue the Jesuit enterprise in Brazil in the second half of the eighteenth century, in the context of intellectual debates and political disputes in Portugal and in Europe. It focuses on polemical questions involving Jesuits and Brazil in two levels: the broader discussions about the New World among enlightened philosophers and the conflict between the Jesuits and the Portuguese Crown. This is a partial result of a current research aiming at elucidating the problematic participation of Brazil in the dispute on the Americas and its contribution to the constitution of some cultural identity in the period prior to the independence. I do so looking at three different

sources: the writings of Jesuits exiled from Brazil, the works of enlightened Catholic opponents of the Jesuits in Portugal, and the theses of enlightened European philosophers.

The choice to focus on late eighteenth century is deliberate: it was the time when the Jesuits were a polarizing issue across Europe, and particularly in Portugal they had 'a rich past and an uncertain future', mostly because of the clash of interests between the Society of Jesus and the Portuguese Crown. This was also a period of great uncertainties about the future of Brazil and, of course, to that of Portugal. Portugal was where the Society was stronger since its foundations - to the point that the Pope gave ecclesiastical political power to the Portuguese king - and Brazil was where the Jesuit had their first oversea missionary experience, and for a long time without competition from other religious orders as in New Spain, for instance. By the eighteenth century, however, Portugal had become the most anti Jesuit country in Europe. In several ways, the intellectual debates and political disputes between Pombal and the Jesuits in Portugal had a direct influence on the outgrowing anti-Jesuit campaign that culminated with the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773.

The expulsion of the Jesuits coincided with Enlightenment discussions about the New World and with the appearance of a significant amount of literature by or about Jesuits in Brazil that can be better explored. A rich bibliography on the Portuguese Enlightenment and the Jesuits is mainly concerned with the contentions between them and the Marquis of Pombal. The common assumption is that the dispute between the Jesuits and the king, Don Jose I, and his prime minister the Marquis de Pombal, the architect of enlightened despotism in Portugal, centered on the necessary modernization of Portugal, including its relations with Brazil. Pombal accused the Society of Jesus of ultramontanism, which he viewed as responsible for the lack of a sense of nation in Portugal and which challenged the divine right of kings. The expulsion was seen as a necessary step in the creation of a nation state in Portugal and one that would strengthen its ties with the Brazilian colony. The Jesuits countered and argued in favor of their fundamental role as the best allies of the Crown in the colonization of Brazil, through their missions and educational activities. As Pombal sought to develop a strategy for Europeanizing Brazil through miscegenation, which was different from Spain, Jesuit opposition and accusations that the Society encouraged uprisings of Indians against the crown intensified conflicts and culminated in the suppression of the Society.

Very few works, however, related this conflict with other polemics across Europe, which also involved the Jesuits and the New World. One important exception is the fundamental work of Antonello Gerbi on the 'Dispute of the New World', which stresses the relation of this polemic with the expulsion of the Jesuits from the Iberian Countries and their American colonies [1]. He presents the second stage of a polemic started in the sixteenth century with Las Casas black legend as involving primarily the exiled Jesuits and the American Founding Fathers. It was based on the notion of a presumed inferiority in the nature of the Americas, and especially its fauna, including man, in comparison with the Old World. The obvious conclusion was that the entire Western Hemisphere found it condemned as decadent and corrupt by the derogatory theses of such Enlightenment

philosophers as Comte de Buffon, Cornelius De Pauw, Guillaume Raynal and William Robertson. It was a dispute marked by eulogy and slander, the panegyric and vituperation of the New World. It was echoed in philosophy, in anthropology, in the satire of the society, in the natural sciences, and, most surprisingly, in poetry.

Concerning the participation of exiled Jesuits, Gerbi devotes one chapter on 'The Reaction to De Pauw in Spanish America', ignoring the Portuguese America. Gerbi describes the unusual nature of the material that scholars confront while tracking the reaction to the polemic in Spanish America as, instead of works on natural history or philosophy, reactions to these 'calumnies' appear in treatises on politics or medicine. Brazil features only in an appendix called 'Suggestion for further Research' where Gerbi wonders: 'As for Portuguese America is it really possible that no Brazilian writer sided with or against Buffon? It can only be my own fault or misfortune that I have not succeeded in finding any' [2] .

Then I asked myself: Could it be that while Jesuits expelled from almost every Spanish American colony wrote pieces on their countries opposing the 'scientific theories' produced by enlightenment philosophers, none of the Jesuits expelled from Brazil did so? Considering the intense network between Jesuits from different parts of the world and their profound involvement with the Brazilian colony, it would be odd that they did not behave like their brothers in Spanish America, who were also persecuted by the enlightened despots ruling in Portugal and Spain.

One would easily argue: why does it matter whether or not Brazil was a part of the 'Dispute of the New World'? It seems to me that, among other options, this could be a way to approach the issue of the Jesuits and that of the Brazilian search for a cultural identity. Much has been researched and published about the search for a Brazilian cultural identity in the eighteenth and the following centuries, and about the fight between Pombal and the Jesuits. My contribution to the theme would be by addressing it from a different angle: correlating the pursuit of a cultural identity and the Jesuit issue, and both of these themes with European perceptions of Brazil. While emphasizing the possible use of this literature to measure the Brazilian reaction to enlightenment detraction of the Americas, I hope also to provide an approach to this decisive moment of Brazilian history from the point of view of intellectual history.

The plausibility of the Brazilian case was always among my preoccupation during my last years studying the Jesuits in the Iberian World, but it grew significantly when I was able to locate important primary sources during a current research at Woodstock Theological Center at Georgetown University researching Jesuits, Enlightenment and the search for a Brazilian Cultural identity. It is giving me confidence to say that I may be able to complement and, in some ways, challenge Antonello Gerbi, by showing that Brazilian writers did participate in the dispute, and that they were aware of the enlightened philosophers theses. However, because of the intensity of the anti-Jesuit propaganda in Portugal, they were primarily concerned with responding to Pombal's accusations.

Like their Spanish American brothers, the Portuguese Americans Jesuits expressed their reactions to such theses through memoirs, political treatises, and poetry, and, in both contexts, the discussion occurred within a Catholic framework. But in Portugal the Society of Jesus encountered stronger opposition not only from the Crown but also from other Catholic orders, specially the Oratorians. Even so, the writings of the actors involved with the Jesuit question showed familiarity with European enlightened writings on the New World, more precisely with the issues dealing with the Iberian colonization and the role of the Jesuits.

In other words, it is not possible to separate the analysis of the place of the Jesuits and Brazil within the Portuguese Catholic enlightenment from that of these themes across Europe. The time when conflicts between Jesuits and the Portuguese Crown intensified, culminating with the suppression of the Society in 1773 did coincide with the enlightened polemic on the New World and with the appearance of a significant amount of literature on Jesuit in Brazil, either written by the Jesuits, by Pombal's and other representatives of the Portuguese Enlightened despotism, or Europeans enlightened philosophers. But the volume Portuguese works aiming at European audiences seems certainly to be smaller than in the Hispanic World. Why?

The success of the Pombaline compared to the Bourbon reforms may account for the difference in the amount and type of material one finds on Brazil. Even so, a rich bibliography on the Portuguese Enlightenment and the Jesuits seems to be opening up other ways to approach the classical clash between Pombal and the Jesuits within the Catholic Enlightenment and its significance to the European discussion on the Americas. [3] With the Bourbon Reforms, Spain was trying to re-conquer, through reconstruction, its ultramarine colonies, excluding the colonial elite, strongly influenced by the Jesuits. Portugal was attempting to build a Brazilian elite. It demanded an enterprise of construction, of internal re-organization of the Portuguese kingdom in the sense of creating a colonial society there. The Marquis of Pombal, head of the reforms, had no choice but to appeal for the participation of this recently created colonial elite. Together with his advisors in Portugal - called the 'estrangeirados' (the foreigners) - Pombal sought to develop a pragmatic strategy for "Europeanizing" Brazil through racial miscegenation. The Jesuit opposition to this and the accusation of that the Society of Jesus was encouraging uprisings of the Indians against the Crown led to the expulsion. While attempting at a 'modernization' of its Brazilian subject, Pombal had more success than Charles III in securing the loyalty of the colonial elite to the Portuguese Crown. One important consequence was that while the reforms of Charles III are considered the beginning of the process of independence in the Hispanic American colonies, the Pombaline reforms sealed an alliance between Brazilian and Portuguese elite, which explains the moderate involvement in the Dispute of New World, as well as the moderate transition of Brazil to an empire, instead of a republic, by the time of its independence. Jesuits and Brazil in the Enlightenment disputes in Portugal and Europe

The Jesuit writings from Italian exile include works of José Caeiro, who wrote the most complete narrative on the expulsion of the Jesuits from Brazil, and that of José Rodriguez de Melo, author of an epical poem on Brazilian rustic life [4] . From the Portuguese

prison João Daniel authored a fundamental treatise on the Amazon (republished in 2004), and Amselm von Eckart, a German Jesuit who had been missionary in Amazon wrote his memoirs [5]. Both had been exiled to Portugal in 1757, two years before the expulsion under accusation of insuflating the Indians.

The anti-Jesuit propaganda is particularly visible in the writings of the Portugal first minister Marquis of Pombal and the Oratonian priest Luis A. Vernei [6]. The enlightened philosophers such as Cornelius De Pauw and William Robertson criticized the Iberian colonization, but had a positive evaluation of the Jesuit missionary system in South America [7]. They all saw Jesuits as an island of civilization among the barbarians. The work of the ex-Jesuit encyclopedist Guillaume Raynal is of particular interest because it focused on the Portuguese colonization of Brazil and provoked a reaction in Portugal and Brazil. Another important source is the former Jesuit Basílio da Gama, author of an epic poem celebrating the liberation of Guarani Indians through Pombal's destruction of the Jesuit missions in South of Brazil, which received an apologetic answer from the Jesuit Lorenz Kaulen. Pombal's book on Jesuits missions in Paraguay also received a refutation by the Jesuit Cardiel [8]. These sources reveal the complexity and uniqueness of the situation within the Luso-American world.

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The confrontation of Jesuit writings with those by their Catholic enlightened opponents in Portugal, and the contrast of both with the theses of the enlightened European philosophers makes possible to clarify the problematic participation of Brazil in the Dispute of the New World. This makes possible to offer a reinterpretation of the issue opposing Pombal and the Jesuits in Portugal as part of a larger framework: the European enlightenment disputes on the New World and the Americas's search for some cultural identity, here represented by the Brazilian case.

It seems to me that, although some of the Jesuit and other authors cited are known, framing them around these topics may be a way to help comprehending the complex reaction of Catholic thinkers to the European Enlightenment through their writings on Brazil and the Jesuits. Through the confrontation of views on these subjects among these authors and others who may be found, I am looking forward to linking intellectual debates and political polemics not often recognized as such. As suggested by Quentin Skinner, instead of studying each author in his context in a chronological order, it aims at approaching the main issues of an epoch and the position of different groups and/or actors towards them [9].

The analysis of how these topics were approached by the enlightened philosophers, Jesuits and their opponents relates to the dilemmas faced by Brazil and Portugal in the late colonial period with those of the Society of Jesus, and both with the first attempts at constructing some kind of cultural identity in Brazil. The Jesuit matter can be taken as a symbol for a complex set of attitudes involving Old World and New, European and

Indian, culture and nature, religion and progress, past and present. The ones I have diagnostic so far are:

- 1) The Jesuits exiled from Brazil - José Caeiro, João Daniel, Anselmo Eckart and Rodriguez de Melo - praising Brazil and their role in its colonization, either in their works written from the Portuguese prisons or from exile in Italy.
- 2) The European Enlightenment literature - Raynal, De Pawn and Robertson - being critical of the Iberian colonization of the New World but approving the Jesuit enterprise in the Americas. They viewed the Jesuits as islands of civilization among barbarians Indians and colonizers.
- 3) Representatives of the Enlightened Despotism in Portugal such as Pombal had a positive evaluation of their colonial enterprise in Brazil and a negative view of the Jesuits there. Along with representatives of the Portuguese Catholic Enlightenment (Vernei) opposed to Jesuit ultramontanism and educational system as obstacles to the necessary modernization of Portugal and Brazil. Both associated Jesuits with a past to be surpassed
- 4) The only Brazilian in this dispute had also a unique position on these topics as well: he glorified the Indians, approved the Portuguese colonization of the New World, and blamed the Jesuits. May not be a mere coincidence that the author, José Basílio da Gama, was a former Jesuit, who was questioned by the Jesuit Lorenz Kaulen on the historical grounds of his poem and by

As I am still working in each one of these topics, I would conclude this text with some considerations on the Catholic Portuguese enlightenment and its relation with the Jesuits. Although it is more directly connected to item 3, it sheds light on the context in which polemics were taking place.

Conclusion: Catholics and Enlightenment in Portugal

According their opponents in Portugal, mostly Catholics, the Jesuits were the principal upholders of a dead and sterile scholastic tradition, ill suited for the age of reason, and held a near-monopoly of higher education in Portugal. For a crescent number of non-Jesuit authors, however, the Jesuits are viewed as much less closed to modern ideas than their enemies claimed. This is the case of Mario Góngora, Richard Morse, Carlos Stotzer, Kenneth Maxwell, Sebastião da Silva Dias, Samuel Miller, Hernani Cidade and myself, for instance [10]. We all seem to agree with the Jesuit John O'Malley in recognizing the Jesuits as being open-minded in the sense of always trying to combine the new ideas with Thomist philosophy and theology since the foundation of the Society of Jesus: in the sixteenth century the new ideas were coming from Humanism, in the seventeenth mostly from modern science and philosophy and in the eighteenth from enlightenment [11].

In the sixteenth century, the Jesuits were the leaders of the process of assimilating other tendencies (such as Humanism) with scholasticism, as well as supporting kings who were

loyal to the Church and to the pope (being the Jesuits the main confessors and/or advisers of the kings). The eighteenth century Iberian Jesuit (as well as the whole Order) seemed to have lost the battle inside the Catholic 'army' in what relates to the leadership of the necessary reforms in the Church, intimately linked with reforms in the society, in the state, and so on. The Century of Lights posed different challenges for the modernization of religion, more precisely for the Catholic Church, and its relation to the political and social order. If, in general, the dispute was between clericalism and anticlericalism, in the Iberian world it was not. It was rather within the Catholic Church itself in deciding how to update itself to face the new times, especially in terms of political circumstances and ideas. The Jesuits were not just one of these groups, but the most representative of the Catholic Church. Other religious orders, however, grew significantly, particularly in regards to the selective assimilation of enlightenment ideas in their programs for reforming the Catholic Church. This was the case of the Oratorians in Portugal. In the European context, including the Iberian Countries, the Jansenists were also playing an important role.

Important to note is that, up until the first half of the eighteenth century, the friction among several groups within the Catholic Church in the Portuguese (and Spanish) society in terms of politics, religion or philosophy was not significant. This makes one wonders how much the crescent rivalries among them by then, and the choice of the Jesuits as the scapegoat, are interconnected with the difficulties faced by the Iberian empires, especially in their relations with their colonies during the first half of the Century of Lights. In other words, some of those who became the worst enemies of the Jesuits by the second half of the eighteenth century shared, until recently, common interests with them, in political, economic, theological, and educational matters. The best example for our interest here is the colonization of Brazil. Besides differing on the ways of colonizing it, Jesuits and Portuguese colonizers were part of the enterprise. Then, there may not be just a coincidence that the polemics between these groups would deal with the place of Brazil within the Portuguese empire and, of course, their role in building a better place than their opponents. In doing so, consciously or not, they were contributing for a view of Brazil that was assimilated, in different ways and degrees, by European and Brazilian audiences.

[1] GERBI, Antonello. *The Dispute of the New World. The History of a Polemic, 1750-1900*. University of Pittsburg Press, 1973.

[2] GERBI, A. *Op. cit.* p.663

[3] See, among others, GÓNGORA, Mario. *Studies in the Colonial History of Spanish America*. Cambridge/London/New York/Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 1975; MILLER, Samuel. *Portugal and Rome c. 1748-1830 : an aspect of the Catholic enlightenment*. Roma: Università Gregoriana, 1978.

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[8] GAMA, Basílio da. O Uruguai. [1786]; KAULEN, Lorenz. Reposta apologetica ao poema intitulado O Uruguay composto por José Basilio da Gama, e dedicado a Francisco Xavier de Mendonca Furtado, irmão de Sebastião José de Carvalho, conde de Oeyras, e marquez de Pombal, Lugano.s.n.,[1786]. This was publish under a different name 'Refutação das calunnias contra os jesuítas contidas no poema 'Uruguay' de José Basilo da Gma' in Revista do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico,tomo LXVIII, parte 1a , pp.92/224 (1907); CARDIEL, Josef. 'Declaracion de la verdad contra un Livélio infamatorio, empresso en Portuges contra os PP. Jesuitas Missioneros del Paraguay, y Marañon' [1758].

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[11] See MALLEY, John. *The First Jesuits*. Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press, 1993.