

Labor, Heresy, and Generous Minds: the 17th Century Jesuits of Maryland

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Spring 2012

The North Atlantic in the early 17th century was a place of massive turmoil. Roman Catholic and Protestant forces vied for control of territories; Protestant England warred with Catholic Spain. Economic woes made the lives of ordinary people miserable and many dreamed of a new life in the nascent colonies of North America. Recent success at Jamestown in the English colony of Virginia provided impetus for subsequent colonization and a new charter was granted for the formation of the colony of Maryland. The recipient of this new charter was Sir George Calvert, Secretary of State under King James I of England. In recognition of Calvert's loyalty the king awarded him the title First Baron Baltimore of Ireland.¹ George Calvert, born Catholic but forced to convert to Protestantism at the age of twelve, reverted back to Catholicism after his resignation, and so it is especially remarkable that his petition for the colonial charter was granted. George Calvert died shortly before the charter was finalized leaving the task of forming the colony to his son, Lord Cecil Calvert Second Lord Baltimore, who received the charter in 1632.² Cecil dispatched his brother Leonard Calvert to build the new colony. Joining the colonists were four Jesuit priests, especially chosen by their superiors at the Jesuit headquarters in France. Following the tradition of previous Jesuit missionaries, the leader of the four priests, Father Andrew White, collated letters from the individual monks to be

¹ "George Calvert, 1st Baron Baltimore," in *Encyclopædia Britannica Online* [online]; available from <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/51047/George-Calvert-1st-Baron-Baltimore-of-Baltimore>; internet; accessed April 14, 2012.

² Ibid.

sent back as a report of the group's progress. These letters are compiled as *Relatio Itineris in Marylandium*, and known colloquially as *The Jesuit Relations*. **The Letters reveal the daily lives and struggles of the priests as they attempted to reconcile the dogma of their faith with their experience of the natural world, navigate treacherous political, economic and class concerns, and interpret native cultures as they spread their faith in the new world colony of Maryland.**

Jesuit priests were highly educated and lived an ascetic lifestyle. The Society of Jesus, founded by Ignatius of Loyola in 1534, required all Jesuits spend a period as college professors. Most Jesuits who had joined from England had studied at the leading universities of Oxford or Cambridge.³ The 1620 publication of Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* had instituted a revolution in the conception of humans in relation to nature, appointing the individual as the measurer and interpreter of natural phenomena via inductive reasoning. **The competing narratives within *The Letters* demonstrate the attempts of the priests to balance the dogmatic scholasticism of the church and the emerging understandings of science.** In fact, the strength of their religious interpretation is borne out by the description of their embarkation. The Jesuits noted the auspicious date of their departure by invoking a patron saint and set sail aboard the ships the Ark and the Dove "on the 23d of November, Saint Clement's day, on which he, being bound to an anchor and cast into the sea, obtained a crown of martyrdom, and afforded his people a way to land, as the miracles of God declare."⁴ Father White first exhibits a

³ Nicholas P. Cushner, *Why Have You Come Here?: the Jesuits and the First Evangelization of Native America* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2006), 8.

⁴ Andrew White, *Relatio Itineris in Marylandiam: Relation of the Colony of the Lord Baron of Baltimore, in Maryland* (Lexington: BiblioBazaar, 2009), 8.

more dualistic understanding with his observations regarding the favorable wind conditions during their journey:

I do not readily perceive the reason of so constant a wind, unless, perchance... extracting from the sea two kinds of exhalation, one dry, from the sea salt, the other moist, of the nature of water... The sun, therefore, attracting each to itself is the reason why they always preserve the same oblique course as the sun, and at all times follow the sun... From this also can be deduced a reason why the gulf was at this season free from calm... But the calms are more common in the summer season when the sun is crossing the equator towards us; and attracts the salt and aqueous exhalations, not obliquely but almost perpendicular.⁵

The Letters show these Jesuits believed it possible to adduce the laws of nature based on reasoned analysis. This emphasis on reason on the part of devout Catholics arose within the intellectual movement called Scholasticism. Scholasticism, a philosophical movement within the Catholic Church, sought to build a dialectical Christian ontology based on Aristotelian methods of reasoned observation of the natural world.⁶ Initially Catholic scholastics attempted to recover the philosophical methods of the Greeks. The period known as Second Scholasticism was an attempt on the part of the church, led by Jesuit thinkers, that sought a return to biblical language in explaining natural phenomena.⁷ In the previous passage we see that Father White has gone beyond the use of language that places God as the conscious progenitor of physical phenomena and instead relies on mechanical properties of physical laws as the determinate. This is a tentative movement away from supernatural metaphysical explanations and towards the emergent

⁵ White, *Relatio*, 12.

⁶ Turner, W., "Scholasticism," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* [on-line]; available from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13548a.htm>; Internet; accessed April 21, 2012.

⁷ *Ibid.*

philosophies of the Enlightenment. Father White, well read and likely aware of the publications of the rising continental scientists of his period, would have been somewhat familiar with the new works being produced on the continent. For example, Sir Francis Bacon had detailed his scientific method of inductive reasoning, whereby hypotheses about the natural world could be tested via experimentation.⁸ In Catholic France René Descartes developed his complimentary method of deductive reasoning. Through this new Scientific Method, humankind was becoming empowered to investigate the world. People were becoming more able to make interpretations of physical processes that questioned the established and traditional authorities. This quality of rationalism was recognized by the missionaries in the native people: “They are readily swayed by reason, nor do they withhold their assent obstinately from the truth set forth in a credible manner.”⁹ Not only are people endowed with a capacity of rational discernment, but this quality is independent of culture and race, a universal capacity to determine truth via dialectics. Father Young made initial observations that sought natural causal explanations, always tempered by deference to God as the prime force underlying events.

The Letters reveal that the Jesuits had an interest in understanding the methods by which the natural world operates. The Jesuits were knowledgeable about anatomy and note, after an attack on an Indian convert to Christianity, that the man had been “run through from the right side to the left, at a hand’s breadth below the armpit, near the heart

⁸ Robert Tignor et al., *Worlds Together, Worlds Apart: A History of the World: From 1000 CE to the Present (Third Edition) (Vol. 2)*, Third Edition ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 545.

⁹ White, *Relatio*, 34.

itself, with a wound two fingers broad below the armpit.”¹⁰ The predominant medical understanding of the day was based on the ancient works of Hippocrates and Galen, which linked the bodily fluids, or humors, with disease, and categorized illnesses and physical states via their relation to the stars and to the qualities of the four elements.¹¹ The Jesuits desire for knowledge based on observation runs in parallel to other contemporary thinkers. Andreas Vesalius, a Flemish scientist, had disobeyed the rules of the Catholic Church by performing dissections of cadavers, publishing his anatomical work *The Seven Books on the Structure of the Human Body* in 1543.¹² Building on this work, the German physician Paracelsus denied the validity of the ancient Galenist interpretation of medicine and developed his new medical theories based in alchemy, helping to establish a theory of pharmacology.¹³ Father White’s contemporary and fellow Englishman William Harvey had gone so far as to describe the human heart as a pump, beholden to the same immutable mechanical laws as the mechanical universe described

¹⁰ White, *Relatio*, 40.

¹¹ “Influences on 17th Century Medicine,” *Royal College of Physicians* [on-line]; available from <http://old.rcplondon.ac.uk/history-heritage/exhibitions/Past-exhibitions/Recipes-for-Health/influences/Pages/Overview.aspx>; Internet; accessed April 21, 2012.

¹² “Comparative Anatomy: Andreas Vesalius,” U.C. Berkeley [online]; available from http://evolution.berkeley.edu/evolibrary/article/history_02; Internet; accessed April 19, 2012.

¹³ A. Crocken, “Paracelsus,” Alchemylab.com [on-line]; available from <http://www.alchemylab.com/paracelsus.htm>; Internet; accessed April 24, 2012.

by the revolutionary astronomers of the day.¹⁴ This reliance on reasoned observation is displayed throughout *The Letters*.

However, as a matter of piety, and in an era of sparse scientific understanding, the Jesuits were careful to always fall back to God as the ultimate causal factor. In their worldview humanity was able to effect material change, and through supplication could positively effect physical outcomes by requesting God intercede on their behalf. In the case of the indigenous man struck by the arrow, the priest, after the initial physiological observation, moves quickly to acknowledge the role of the divine as final arbiter of outcomes, as the following passage describes the priest coming to the aid of the injured man:

“The father... Briefly runs over the principal articles of faith ... He received his confession; then, elevating his soul with hope and confidence in God... Also the litany of the Blessed Virgin, and told him to commend himself to her most holy intercessions... The following day, at the same hour, when by chance... He saw two Indians propelling a boat with oars. Whilst he gazed on the man... he recognized him... Recollecting in what state he had left him the day before, when the man, on a sudden having thrown open his cloak, And having disclosed the cicatrices of the wounds, or rather a red spot on each side, as the trace of the wound... he explains, 'that he is entirely well , nor had he ceased to invoke the most holy name of Jesus, to whom he attributed his recovered health'... All who were in the boat... were greatly rejoice and confirmed in the faith at this miracle.”¹⁵

In the early 17th century a Catholic was only permitted to delve into secular interpretations of the physical world so far. Any explanation that did not ultimately rest on God as the basis for truth threatened the authority of the church and was a sinful act.

¹⁴ Lynn Hunt et al., *To 1740*, 3rd ed., vol. 1 of *The Making of the West: Peoples and Cultures* (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008), 476.

¹⁵ White, *Relatio*, 41.

An increase in the reliance on reason was not the only threat faced by the Catholic Church. Incrementally the forces of the Protestant Reformation were threatening the dominant position of the Papacy in the religio-political hierarchy. Martin Luther, a monk with deep concern for his spiritual health, had published his *Ninety-five Theses* in 1517, a work that denied the position of the Catholic Church as the legitimate intermediary between the spiritual aspirant and God, arguing that the bible and not the church was the only authority on the will of God.¹⁶ Though Luther was excommunicated in January 1521¹⁷, the idea that man could question the church sparked a belief that man could question other traditional authorities, both political and economic.¹⁸ The Reformation was begun, and Protestant forces opposed to the Papal Catholic order soon controlled large portions of Northern Europe.

Henry the VIII, king of England, officially broke with the Catholic Church in 1532 because of civic and political matters.¹⁹ Interactions between Catholics and Protestants would continue to deteriorate up to and throughout the period when the Jesuits embarked on their voyage. **The Letters demonstrate that the priests were intimately aware of the political tensions in Europe and the colonies, and sought to**

¹⁶ “Martin Luther,” in Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy [on-line]; available from <http://www.iep.utm.edu/luther/>; Internet; accessed May 17, 2012.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Lillian Marrujo-Duck, “History 4A Lecture 5/7/12,” (Lecture City College of San Francisco, San Francisco, CA, May 2012).

¹⁹ Robert Tignor et al., *Worlds Together, Worlds Apart: A History of the World: From 1000 CE to the Present (Third Edition)* (Vol. 2), Third Edition ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 428.

balance their actions between their missionary duties and the dangers inherent in the political divide.

As soon as the Jesuits arrived they found themselves thrust into political intrigue when a man from Virginia, initially sympathetic to the Calverts, conspires to turn the natives against the them.

“The Governor had taken as companion in his visit to the chieftain, Capt. Henry Fleet, a resident of Virginia, a man very much beloved by the savages, and acquainted with their language and settlements. At the first he was very friendly to us; afterwards, seduced by the evil counsels of a certain Claiborne, who entertains the most hostile disposition, he stirred up the minds of the natives against us with all the arts of which he was master.”²⁰

The Protestant William Claiborne had founded a successful trading post on Kent Island, in the upper portion of the Chesapeake Bay. Claiborne was eventually forced to concede his interest in the trading post as it came under the newly established boundaries of the Maryland colony, an injury he would nurse for many years as he strove to pit Protestant Virginia against Catholic Maryland.²¹

The monks saw the spiritual human world as divided into three camps: the Catholics who would be saved, Heretics who knew the gospel of Jesus as propounded by the Papal authorities but had denied its veracity, and those ignorant of the Catholic rites as the only method towards salvation, as the truth of the Papacy had not been sufficiently

²⁰ White, *Relatio*, 20.

²¹ Matthew Gibson, “William Claiborne (1600–1679),” *Encyclopedia Virginia*, http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Claiborne_William_1600-1679 (accessed November 2, 2012).

revealed to them.²² Into the last group fell the indigenous peoples, into the group of damned Heathens fell all Protestants. The Jesuits held great hope that they would be able to bring the native people into the Catholic fold. One of the priests writes of the successes in relaying the Catholic faith to the Piscataway people. In a conversation with Archihu, tutor to the young chief, the priest proclaims “he willingly gave ear while explaining... certain things concerning the errors of the heathens... informed that we had not come thither for the purpose of war, but for the sake of benevolence, that we might imbue a rude race with the precepts of civilization, and open up a way to heaven.”²³ The priest refrains from discussing conversion outright, due to the delicate nature of his interpreter being a Protestant, instead declaring that he will return at an opportune time. The tutor, Arachihu, approves of the new relationship and exclaims that “this is agreeable to my mind... We will use one table; my attendants shall go hunt for you, and all things will be common with us.”²⁴ The Jesuits are careful not to enflame tensions with the Protestants as they pursue their goal of converting the natives. Though the priests hoped additionally to convert the Protestants, they had no illusions about the political dangers inherent in dealing with those they considered heathens.

Conversely the Protestants saw the Catholics as corrupt idolaters and devil worshippers, followers of the anti-Christ as embodied in the Pope.²⁵ *The Letters* expose

²² Allan Greer, ed., *The Jesuit Relations: Natives and Missionaries in Seventeenth-Century North America* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000), 17.

²³ White, *Relatio*, 20.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁵ Cushner, *Why*, 2.

the fears of the priests, who realized that “in Virginia no advantage was expected from our countrymen, for they are hostile to this new plantation.”²⁶ Although the Protestant King of England had granted a charter to the Catholic Calverts, little goodwill could be expected from the Protestant subjects of the crown.

Protestants were especially suspicious of the Jesuits of the Society of Jesus. In 1598, in the nationalistic cause of a strong French government, the Edict of Nantes had codified a measure of religious tolerance by allowing certain Protestant minorities the right to practice their faith within the Catholic kingdom of France.²⁷ The Protestant population of the colonies did not view the Jesuits with such equanimity but saw them as political schemers and agents of Papal imperialism.²⁸ During the voyage to Maryland, Father White notes “Montserrat is inhabited by Irishmen who have been expelled by the English of Virginia, on account of their profession of the catholic [sic] faith.”²⁹ The colony of Maryland was hoped to be an example of religious comity, where Protestants and Catholics labored side-by-side, Lord Calvert even hoping that the two factions might share a common place of worship.³⁰ It was not to be and the Jesuits harbored no illusions about the degree to which the Protestants at nearby Jamestown would despise them; Father White arrived in the Colony of Virginia “full of fear lest the English inhabitants, to

²⁶ White, *Relatio*, 14.

²⁷ Hunt, *The Making of the West*, 454.

²⁸ Greer, *The Jesuit Relations*, 9.

²⁹ White, *Relatio*, 17.

³⁰ Cushner, *Why*, 5.

whom our plantation is very objectionable, should plot some evil against us.”³¹ The leaders of the Maryland colony, though, did not allow their fear to preclude their involvement in the Catholic practice of mass: “On the day of the annunciation of the Holy Virgin Mary, on the 25th of March, in the year 1634, we offered on this island, for the first time, the sacrifice of mass... the governor, commissioners, and other catholics [sic] participating in the ceremony.”³²

The Jesuits were confirmed in their suspicions of the Jamestown Protestants some time later when Father White came into conflict with a man whose ship he had hired to transport him into the indigenous empire. “Father White suffered no little inconvenience from a hard-hearted and troublesome captain of New England... from whom he was in fear a little while after, not without cause, that he would either be cast into the sea, or be carried with his property to New England, which is full of puritan Calvinists- that is of all calvinist [sic] heresy.”³³ Conversely the Protestant supposition of the imperialistic aims of the Jesuit priests, rather than the stated aims of only tending to the existing Catholics of Maryland, was borne out when later on the same trip to Indian territory mentioned here, Father White was successful in gaining converts to the Holy Roman Empire, “for during that time was added to the church the ruler of that little village, with the other principle men of its inhabitants, who received the faith of Christ and baptism.”³⁴

³¹ White, *Relatio*, 18.

³² *Ibid.*, 19.

³³ *Ibid.*, 38.

³⁴ White, *Relatio*, 38.

The indigenous tribe of the area surrounding St. Mary's City, the seat of the Maryland government and location of the Jesuit mission, were the Yaocomico, who had sold Lord Calvert the land upon which the city was built, and who were eager to form an alliance with the English as a means of defending themselves from recent raids by their adversaries, the Susquehannoks.³⁵ The Jesuits were eager for relations as well, not only because they hoped to convert the Yaocomicos, but because they hoped to follow the path laid out by previous French Jesuit missionaries who had solicited, or in the case of the Spanish Jesuits compelled, laborers from neighboring tribes to build the mission's infrastructure. The Jesuits had not received any support from the rulers of the Maryland colony, besides the plot of land given to all who signed on to the colonial endeavor, and so would have to be self-sufficient and work the land for their survival.³⁶

This necessity for self-sufficiency, and the realities of the poor economy back home, compelled the missionaries to be entrepreneurial in their endeavors. *The Letters shows that the Jesuits operated under the economic realities of their time and exhibited the same rigid class-consciousness inherent in English society of the day.* War in Europe had made the lives of the peasantry increasingly insecure. In order to pay war debts, states raised taxes and deliberately inflated the currency.³⁷ Poverty stricken peasants were starving and roving groups of the destitute would loot villages and riot

³⁵ Cushner, *Why*, 14.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁷ Hunt, *The Making of the West*, 464.

over food shortages.³⁸ The relatively new institution of the corporation gave autonomy and governing power to companies founded by wealthy merchants and nobility under charter from the English crown.³⁹ Corporations would charge a fee for the opportunity to sail to the new world as a colonist: those unable to afford passage could sell themselves into indentured servitude. The new colonies, because of the vast amount of arable land, suffered a labor shortage, and so the solution, before the rise of slavery, was to bring indigent Europeans to provide the labor.⁴⁰ In exchange for passage to the colonies plus food and lodging, a laborer would sell himself into bondage for a period of from four to seven years; as many as one-half to two-thirds of the new immigrants came as indentured servants.⁴¹ The language in *The Letters* shows that the issues of labor weighed on the minds of the priests. “It is plainly evident that a harvest will by no means be wanting to us...but rather it is feared that there will not be laborers for gathering so abundant a harvest.”⁴² The Jesuits availed themselves of the new labor source, and additionally benefited the mission of converting souls to the Catholic faith.

“For of the Protestants who came from England this year, 1638, almost all have been converted to the faith, besides many others, with four servants that we bought for necessary use in Virginia...The same work of charity some others have preformed, buying thence catholic [sic] servants, of

³⁸ Charles C. Mann, *1493: Uncovering the New World Columbus Created* (New York: Knopf, 2011), 209.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴⁰ “Indentured Servants in The U.S.” PBS.org [on-line]; available from <http://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/feature/indentured-servants-in-the-us/>; Internet; accessed May 19, 2012.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² White, *Relatio*, 36.

whom there is a plenty here. For it is said that to each person there, very many have sold themselves as servants.”⁴³

The Jesuits were active participants in the dominant labor market of the time. Purchasing the services of Catholics was seen in a positive light, as it was possible to gain their services as well as their souls. “The two catholics [sic] who had sold themselves into servitude in Virginia we have redeemed, nor was the money ill expended... The same work of charity some others have preformed, buying thence catholic [sic] servants, of whom there is a plenty here. For it is said that to each person there, very many have sold themselves as servants, who, living among men of most profligate example, and destitute of of all spiritual aid, for the most part, make shipwrecks of their lives.”⁴⁴ The priests were not above viewing the behaviors of their Protestant neighbors in terms of culture, and judged them of a poor class of corrupt people.

The accusation of corruption went both ways and in the face of charges of corruption from the Protestants, Popes of the period had become increasingly ascetic.⁴⁵ The Jesuits took additional vows of poverty and obedience beyond those required of regular priests.⁴⁶ England in this period held rigid class distinctions, to a degree difficult to comprehend today.⁴⁷ In spite of their vows, the Jesuits still considered themselves above the mundane and profane work of menial chores, lamenting, after the neighboring

⁴³ White, *Relatio*, 25.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴⁵ Tignor, *Worlds Together*, 473.

⁴⁶ Greer, *The Jesuit Relatons*, 3.

⁴⁷ Mann, *1493*, 51.

Jamestown Protestants had sacked their city and they had been forced into hiding, “they have no servant, either for domestic use or for directing their way through unknown and suspected places, or even to row and steer the boat, if at any time there is need.”⁴⁸ *The Letters* show the Jesuits distinguished between the noble classes and the commoners as one passage mentions

“Another man who was of noble birth, had been reduced to such poverty by his own unrestrained licentiousness, that he sold himself into this colony...when he had been recalled by one of us, to the right faith and the fruit of good living...brought him to a state of tranquil peace.”⁴⁹

The missionaries’ opinions of the indigenous people were more dismissive, as they judge them based on their physical state of dress, deemed inferior to the European modes.

“When rulers and kings are spoken of, let no one in his mind form an august idea of men, such as the different princes of Europe. For these Indian kings, though they have the most absolute power of life and death over their people...are scarcely any thing removed from the multitude.”⁵⁰

The monks were surprised by the manner in which the Queen of the Patuxent tribe was willing to engage in labors of the profane sort, “for with her own hands...she is accustomed to prepare meat for him and bake bread, with no less care than labor.”⁵¹ The Jesuits took account of the way in which the Queen was willing to engage in the ordinary tasks of daily life and realized that she was unconcerned about social status, though the priests seemed unaware of their heightened conceptions of class. To their credit the

⁴⁸ White, *Relatio*, 44.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

missionaries took a more liberal view of human worth as separate from cultural and class distinctions.

“Whoever shall contemplate in thought the whole earth, will, perhaps, nowhere find men more abject in appearance than these Indians; who, nevertheless, have souls (if you consider the ransom paid by Christ) no less precious than the most cultivated Europeans.”⁵²

Their cultural biases aside, the Jesuits strove to see humanity in the light of their faith, as equal in the eyes of God.

The Letters expose the Jesuit’s conflicting and paternalistic attitudes on the value of native peoples, measured in terms of the degree to which they had assimilated traditional Western and Catholic conventions. *The Letters* narrate the evolution of the Jesuit’s valuation of local peoples from an initial disregard of their humanity to a genuine affinity for their character. The Counter Reformation exhorted the Catholic clergy to abandon idleness and go remake the world according to the Catholic vision.⁵³ The priests believed that through their intricate rituals and incantations the soul of a person, the very essence of an individual, was only salvageable by their methods. Their mission was to harvest souls in the great Manichean battle of good and evil. To comment so casually on the fate of the slaves belies the extent to which they regarded themselves not only a superior in culture to others, but to have more intrinsic human value. Father White casually declares, as the Ark and the Dove move north from the

⁵² White, *Relatio*, 34.

⁵³ Greer, *The Jesuit Relations*, 5.

island “it is pleasant to see the manner in which the cotton hangs from the stalk and the abundance of it.”⁵⁴

The Letters demonstrate that the priests believed it their duty to civilize the savage peoples of the world, by which they meant convert them to Catholic conventions; the worth of the people dependent on how well they adapted to these values. At the island of Matalina their boat was approached by native traders whom the priest describes as “a wild race, filthy, and daubed with purple paint, ignorant of a God, and greedy of human flesh; and a little while before had eaten up the English interpreters...I hope commiseration of this abandoned race has seized some one, at some time.”⁵⁵ The detached scientific inquiry exhibited in earlier passages is not evident in these lines is, but rather the very human and base emotions of fear and distrust, to be remedied only when someone is able to repair these barbarians through indoctrination of European customs. We are left to wonder at their regard for the sanctity of African life, as the only encounter narrated occurs after the long initial Atlantic voyage, at the start of the document.

“Reflection upon the Divine Providence mitigated the cruel treatment of men... we were rescued from a great danger at Barbados, for the slaves through the whole island conspired for the slaughter of their masters...resolved to seize the first ship...The conspiracy having been disclosed...the execution of one of the leaders served for the security of the island and for our safety; for our ship...had been destined for their prey; and on the very day on which we landed we found eight hundred men under arms in order to prevent this most imminent crime.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ White, *Relatio*, 15.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

The choice of words used here, where men avoid suffering and are under arms, while the slaves, agitating for their freedom, are conspiring a terrible crime, demonstrates the pronouncement of the latter group as sub-human. By modern standards this racism would be evident, but in the minds of the Jesuits in the 17th century certain people were deserving of grace, while others were inherently damned. The Jesuits believed themselves to be the legitimate arbiters of morality and civilization.

Arriving in Maryland, having allied with the Yaocomico against the Sussquehannoks, the attitudes of the Jesuits towards the natives change drastically. Their change of heart they credit to God, who was “by these miracles, opening a way for his law and eternal life.”⁵⁷ Finding these natives receptive to their culture, they endow them with the more noble attributes most often reserved for their fellow travelers. “Truly this is like a miracle, that savage men, a few days before arrayed in arms against us, so readily trust themselves like lambs to us, and surrender themselves and their property to us.” The Jesuits seem naïve to the nature of the diplomatic overtures of the Yaocomico Empire. With further exposure to the local people, the missionaries seem to loosen the strictures of their ethnocentrism and begin to experience the Yacomacoe as full humans. “They keep themselves as much as possible from wine and warm drinks, nor are they easily induced to taste them, except those whom the English have infected with their vices...they cultivate generous minds; whatever kindness you may offer them, they repay.”⁵⁸ The Jesuits attribute to the Indian’s behavior positive qualities and favorable characters. There is the matter of their souls though, and only conversion to the Catholic

⁵⁷ White, *Relatio*, 21.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

faith will render these people a true asset to the Jesuits. “If once they are imbued with Christian precepts, will become worthy promoters of virtue and humanity.”⁵⁹ The very quality of the native’s humanity rested on their acquiescence to the Catholic faith.

Even in an act of compassion we see the dual nature of the priests attitudes towards the indigenous people. They are aware of how their actions may be interpreted and so, in conjunction with a genuine empathy, go to some expense to help the Indians in a time of need.

“When famine prevailed among the Indians on account of the great drought of the last summer, that we might not appear to neglect their bodies for the care of whose souls we had made so great a voyage, though corn was sold at a great price, nevertheless we considered it necessary to relieve their want of bread.”⁶⁰

The final value of the indigenous people, like the final value of all men, was conceived of by the missionaries as the allegiance of their immortal soul, to accept the Catholic faith was to earn for God a soul in the counting game between the forces of good and the forces of evil. Subsequent entries show this to be true. After increasing strife with their Protestant neighbors and growing malaise within the Catholic community of Maryland, the letters dwindle down to a mere recounting of the volume of conversions, a summation of the business of harvesting fruit. “1673...brought into the fold of the church twenty-eight; but by sacred baptism have regenerated seventy infants to Christ. 1674...thirty-four have been brought to the faith and the Catholic Church; seventy-five have been baptized; seven general confessions have been received.”⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ White, *Relatio*, 35.

⁶¹ Ibid., 47.

In analyzing *The Letters*, one finds ample evidence of the manner in which the priests comported themselves as they sought to interpret the natural world in light of their faith, their strategies for navigating the political and economic forces of the day, and the attitudes they expressed about the indigenous peoples they encountered. In their effort to interpret the natural world we see the age of miracles slowly being eclipsed by the modern methods of inquiry based on observation and the struggle to maintain the primacy of a divine hand in a world slowly being catalogued and demystified by the growing disciplines of science. We see evolving opinions of what constitutes culture and civilization and by what commonalities differing people may engage one another. The study of their experiences and interpretations may well inform modern readers as they deal with similar issues. With wars, ostensibly, about religion occurring in the modern era, this document may shed light on the workings of xenophobia, classism in the modern world, and issues of competing religious narratives. Throughout *The Jesuit Relations*, we see the myopia inherent in orthodox values; as humanity deals with an ever more connected world the writings of these priests illustrate the degree to which we evaluate ‘others’ based on our subjective interpretation of cultural values. As humanity strives for more equality and justice, the evolving views of these monks towards other cultures offer a reflection on the necessity of a wide understanding of what constitutes civility and the paramount importance of open dialogue between differing people. These monks offer the fundamental lesson that when people engage in earnest communication “they cultivate generous minds; whatever kindness you may offer them they repay.”⁶²

⁶² White, *Relatio*, 23.