Chapter 25

The state of Christianity in the Serra

When the padre had sufficiently instructed his catechumen, he bathed him in the sacred waters and gave him the Christian name of Philip, as already stated in chapter 17. New fruits are always valued. Thus it was, as regards the man of religion and his teaching, on the part of this heathen and of those other heathen who followed his example. Each day the fervour of the idolaters increased, to such profit that over the land there was wonder, and from the sea could be heard nightly the divine melodies of the holy doctrine. Apart from the ordinary services of the church, confessions and spiritual exercises were regularly held, from a widespread desire to profit and benefit souls. The Lord confirmed his religion with various miracles, curing the sick by means of the ministrations of the preachers of the Gospel, making the paralysed and the feeble walk, giving life to those who were living without hope, and lastly drawing certain persons from the jaws of death, as may be seen in the letters from this mission. King Pedro or Tora himself experienced this miracle, the Lord postponing his (final) hour and by His secret discretion slackening the reins of life for two months, until they were again tightened with final force, as I witnessed on 28 January 1610.

As Christianity was proceeding in the right direction, a storm blew up which swept if off course in such a way that I was left impotent, and it brought in its train what still operates today, the new influence of I know not what evil eye. The storm was so disastrous that it overturned all, unsettling so strongly the feelings of the heathen and the new Christians that I hardly know whether there was one left who was not weakened; with the result that those who dissimulate and pretend that they remain the same will never be able to convince anyone in this way of their spiritual health because one has ceased to believe in it. All of them practiced, and had always practiced, a form of Christianity which concealed pagan ceremonies, for they only showed themselves Christian when in the sight of the padre, while in the Lord's sight they were worse than heathen. I do not deny that there are in the Serra today, and have been always, many whom the Lord protected like lilies among thorns. Yet from this place there proceeded so much evil that, though (we have faith that) even in these barren lands God won and the devil lost, it is possible today to entertain more than a single doubt that what happened was the opposite.

(a) "A notable and curious head".
(b) Miracles by which God confirmed the Gospel.
There were two sources (of evil) /f. 112/. The first was the lack of knowledge and will-power on the part of these savages. There can be no desire for improvement unless the understanding appreciates the essence of what it ought to love. The will can only embrace that which the secondary power of the soul presents to it as good. All the heathen in Ethiopia are servile and they tend to follow Epicurean ways. They believe only what they see and touch, and they are guided only by self-interest. This is the idol on which everything is based in the Scrra; so it had to be; twice it was hidden. The infidel savage is lacking in hope; he has lost it. Yet having sight of a vile master, there were afterwards crescent moons; but not having any news of it in 1611 and 1612, they were in suspense, they did not know what had happened to it, whether it had met with a disaster or had been destroyed. Having lost hope of seeing it, they gradually showed us their deceitful tricks, their falsehood, their dissimulation, and the pretences with which they approached in person the Lord's house. Now they no longer concealed or gilded over their deceitful Christianity, so greatly were they involved in their false superstitions and idolatrous rites. What can one expect of pagans who had been bathed, not in the waters of faith but in those of self-interest, other than the brash folly of reopening, in secret and publicly, the grave of idolatry? It was not grace which called them, but self-interest did: it was not the sweet-smelling waters of faith which touched them but the deceitful odour of worldly goods.

(c) Bure's marriage. "No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old", Luke 5 36. Thus, new people into the faith, little by little. See Genesis 33:13-14, "My Lord knoweth that the children are tender, and the flocks and herds with young are with me; and if men should overdrive them one day, all the flock will die... I will lead on softly... as the children [Alvares misquotes, 'cattle'] be able to endure". And 1 Corinthians 3:12, "I have fed you with milk and not with meat", etc.
The heathen in Ethiopia care only for a god of the belly, a god of wine, and for no other faith. To believe otherwise is to deceive ourselves. All of them will become Christians if you have something to give them, but they will be Christians only in name. Teorocoforo used to say: "What is a Christian? Water from my land." So it is lacking in respect for the Sacrament to administer it to such people in their natural state, without recourse to force and arms. *(d)* Or, rather, without their having contact with true Christians, because from that contact they will gain something. And so that everyone will be convinced *(I say that)* none of these heathen normally wants the faith, in the form in which they received it, for any reason other than that of having access to us and hence learning about our affairs and living by our sweat. All are unsteady rocks *(on which to build a church)*. If any one of them is genuinely converted to the Lord, it is due to His great pity and also to the man's being touched within by the light of His most holy religion. So much for the first source *(of evil)*, concerning which it is reasonable that we rely less on apostolic teaching *(? and more on practical experience ?)*, so that those who wish to succeed in similar enterprises may take /f.112v/ this approach.

There is no greater encouragement of evil than lack of illumination in the one who guides; his good intentions lead him astray. *(e)* From this spring many ills. Idolatry, lacking knowledge of the heavens, is so incapable of dealing with heavenly things, that however late these are given they always seem to idolatry like a premature fruit. An understanding corrupted by many and various vices, and which only self-interest can arouse, what can give it confident grounds for expectation? He who is baptised solely in order to gain friends and money, is it not certain that even if harvested in due time he will be always an unripe fruit? Who can doubt it? It is good to give friendship and money freely, but not baptism, which should be charged the just price, that is, and always has been, belief in and profession of Christ Our Saviour, without reservation, explicit or implicit, in favour of some false doctrine or rival worship. Can the ark of the Lord share the altar of our soul with the dragon? How can one expect rigour or

*(d)* Christian communities find force of arms necessary.

*(e)* It is necessary to know the nature of the heathen, when resort to force of arms is lacking, before awarding in baptism the title of son of the Lord. Missionaries should not act hastily. Experience.
the appearance of rigour on the part of a people so savage that they laugh at anything which goes against the flesh? He who does not know or understand how can he have the will (to act)? Without the conditions I propose, it is impossible to gather fruit among these infidels, in the circumstances when one does not have a nursery of young plants raised under the most tender breath of religious instruction. All else is wasted labour, being beyond the order of nature as far as the natives are concerned.

Now let us discuss the second cause of the backsliding of some of our Christians, mere bad example. In the barter and trade of Ethiopia, no item is more common than this pestilence in the air. Whatever Cape Verde, Jolola, Porto de Ale, and all the other ports may possess in the way of riches they abound in nothing more fully than this abomination. How much there is of this on the (Jolof) Coast! It seems that wickedness presumes to deploy its power here with great effrontery, and with the least respect for heaven. Here evil is so embraced that it has reached the point of establishing a school of heresy and the worst ill-doing, killing some with the most subtle poison and leaving others, because they were more robust, incapable of managing their affairs for the rest of their life.

Passing on from the Coast, what other parts have been contaminated with the seeds of hell? Go to Bussis and you will see Christian women sold there to a heathen (king) more savage, cruel and tyrannical than any other. What is worse, some of the women are destined to be sacrificed to chinas when he dies. Who would not be scandalised by this? Who would not consider it wrong to give or sell the adopted children of God for f.113 profit to idolaters for the practice of their false religion? See what goes on in the palace of the king! Who has made him a lascarim and one so well informed about the things that happen in our Iberian homeland? Who has told him about sumptuous royal tombs, about caskets for the embalmed? Who offers them to him, who brings them? Who is it that interests him in writing-desks from China? Who is it that has fortified his port for him with artillery - can it be any other than wickedness itself? Who passes on the information to the tyrants of Guinea that in Spain we buy and sell even the graves we are buried in, buying residences for death, fields to till? Who has mocked ancestry? O unhappy Guinea, how full of misery you are because you lack the standard and guide of good example!

(f) How forgetful all those who have the name of Christian live with regard to its responsibility and cost! This is seen in the example of bad living they give.

(g) Evils are unformed shapes which need labels to state what they are. So dead they have the colours of Christians!

(h) Family tree of hell. Manoel Drago.
soul with the sacrament of confession and who sought to obtain cola and tobacco from his vicar. Who would not be fearful (for such a man), knowing that for thirty years he had not (been confessed) and would thereafter die as a heretic and in total misfortune? I shall not go on (with the list). With such wicked allies, what can be hoped for from conversions, seeing that what makes them increase more than anything else is a good example? With such bad seed, such tares, what corn could survive without the arm of the Almighty? With such winds, in such weather, what torches, even those most carefully lit, could remain alight without the hand of the Lord to shelter them and protect them?

This is the second source (of evil) which I promised to discuss, a source from which evil flows so copiously not only in the places mentioned but here in our Serra, where naturally the force of its currents is stronger inasmuch as they are further away from what might turn them aside and direct them to other regions. But the Lord always comes forward with remedies; and will wound, in order to heal, those whitened sepultures. However this epithet does not (really) fit them since they do not even attempt to be hypocritical. Evil has no mask here, as is always the case where it is tolerated and finds itself feared, and where it is scourged only by the heavens. To see a man (j) of sixty who has spent forty years in Guinea completely crippled, and his body so covered with scars of numerous wounds that he looks like a wall full of holes in which birds might nest and lay their eggs, this would astonish anyone.

When he came to confess before me, not having done so since he confessed before Father Barreira seven years earlier, I asked him about the profit he had gained from life; and he could give me no response other /f.113v/ than the signs of great grief. What shall I say about Jorge Fernandes Gramaio? (k)

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(i) "And he clothed himself with cursing like as with his garments, so let it come into his bowels like water, and like oil into his bones"

Psalm 109:18

(j) Lucas Vaz, a native of Lisbon.

(k) The punishment of Jorge Fernandes Gramaio.
The Lord has been very patient with him. After selling the King of Bussis a Christian slave—woman of his who is today reserved for a sacrifice, as I have stated, on his return to Cacheo from this island he ran upon the Shoals of the Falupos, his ship was wrecked, and he and his company escaped on planks to the shore, where they were captured by the heathen, from whom they were ransomed. What miseries do such people not suffer daily, in life at the hands of the infidels, as their slaves for a term whose length depends solely on the heathen; and at death, as may be believed because it commonly happens here, at the hands of malign spirits, to receive with them the punishment of eternal torments? This could be shown by many examples but I will detail only some more recent ones from our own time.

We award the first place to João Nunes Borges, whom I knew on the Windward Coast. In the year of Our Lord 1610 he came in his ship to the Cagacais. He had as his pilot Rui Lopes, a native of Fogo Island, who, having second sight, saw that this wretched man was always accompanied by a terrible and terrifying form. He asked him, "Master João Nunes, do you understand or acknowledge this thing or person who keeps you company?" João Nunes was very upset by this and asked Rui Lopes to cease these pestering inquiries. In this river he fell sick aboard his ship, and approaching death, could find no-one to comfort him except the evil spirit. The pilot visited him as usual but had to leave, disturbed by the frightful vision. On one occasion he repeated his question, to which he got no reply. The visitor was retiring in terror by the prow of the ship when the sick man died. All around were alarmed by what they heard, for as the soul left, a great blow was felt on the sea, with strange sensations on the ship which made it roll severely. All were terrified, and the pilot was so overcome with fear that about a month later, he died in Rio Nunez from the shock.

(1) The punishment of João Nunes Borges.

(m) Jorge Mendes told me that God punished him; and he fell ill immediately after mimicking a padre of the Society, João de Migris from Italy.

(n) Rui Lopes, brother of Estêvão Lopes, of Fogo Island.
Now let us discuss the torments of António Fernandes, a native of (Fogo) Island, and a wanderer through the thickets of Ethiopia. For his life here he had earned from divine justice the expectation of eternal pains. One night the devil appeared to him in the figure of a duck, with which he exchanged blows but always got the worst. On this occasion one of his companions saw him so exhausted that he was beyond himself. /f.114/ The enemy persecuted him by inventing new forms of punishment, now forcing his hands around his throat to throttle him, now scratching him, now wounding and beating him in the most cruel way, so that it took him many days to recover. The minister of darkness took pleasure in blowing smoke up his nose, which not only burnt him internally but made him bring up a great quantity of blood which poured out of his mouth. All this happened in Bena, in the land of the Sousos. A young man who travelled in company with this wretch, and who told me about it, had his share of the spectacle. He said that he himself could not understand how so much ill could come to a man only for sharing the company of evil men, without imitating them.

"For", he added, "while I was with António Fernandes I never had a quiet and restful night, night being the time when these things happened. The first night I spent with him a little rat ran over me, back and forward, so lightly that I was quite upset. Another time, as I was supping with him, I was struck heavily in the back from behind, and when I turned I saw no-one. Again, when I was asleep I felt great flames which were burning one leg from the knee upwards: I woke up and uttered the name of Jesus, and the evil spirit who was persecuting me immediately disappeared with a loud bang, and the house was filled with a bad smell like that of sulphur; but when I looked around I saw no-one. One night while asleep I felt something chewing my arm; and waking up I saw the face of a woman who grimaced at me and gnashed her teeth. Another time one foot went cold, so that I could not move it. Another time I was plagued by an ants' nest in my bed, and I felt the creatures biting me through skin and flesh, and various other discomforts I shall not describe. A dog we kept barked when the evil spirit entered. I could never find out from my companion the cause of these ills. He claimed they were the responsibility of the King of Bena, but this was false. Had he said that it was the King of Glory who permitted them because of the murders he had committed, I could have believed this more easily. For the king said to me: "White man also have witch. That trouble of António is from God, who has grabbed him because he has a wicked heart".

(o) A hell of torments for António Fernandes, a native of the same island.
The savage was right, for wherever the fugitive went, the torments of the evil spirits never left him. From Bena he went to the Coast. He laughed when he saw the ships and was asked why: he replied /f.114v/ that the sailors who were moving around the upper works and rigging of the ships were making a thousand gestures and grimaces. When he reached the Coast, he lived there greatly afflicted and oppressed by the devil, and since those who dwell in Porto de Ale could not stand the howling of António Fernandes' guests, or rather his companions, everyone ostracised him, and they made him live apart. Thus persecuted, he lived in sadness and died miserably one night at Cacheu, calling out "Help!". The next day they found him, without learning the cause of death. The Lord permits evil-doers to collect no reward of their guilt other than continual agony and distress.

Evil-doing does not stop at this. What can be said about heathen from Portugal who consult witches about their affairs, believing that the art and science of an object of creation can acquire what alone belongs to the divine Creator? Those who insult officials of the heathen in order to acquire their possessions by unjust means, when they could recover them by regular process, to whom do these men not appear evil? Some of them lack concern about attending confessions, and show little respect for holy days by working on them. All this ill conduct receives its reward here in death. Some are lost at sea, some are lost in the forests, some find death at the hands of their own slaves. The misfortunes of our 'monks' could make a litany so long that it would exhaust one to hear it. So that it will not seem our intention to bore and repel with this account those most anxious to read what we write, we here bring to a stop, not charity which prides itself on being without end, but these depressing stories. Let the authors (of these deeds) seek other chroniclers, for such was not our intention, and it was only of necessity that we put in at this melancholy port or quayside.

But to increase confidence in what has been said in our account, we consider that it was very profitable to have made this (mention), in order that those of superior understanding should be warned not to put their trust

(p) Simão Vaz. So it happened to a certain native of Santarem who lived here in great prosperity. He is having a Portuguese in Mitombo killed by a son of Farma. Woodland graft, vineshoot of hell.
in themselves. For it is certain that it is the nature of the land, being fertile, to grow thick woodland, unless it be cultivated with the mattock of the attention we in our small way give to the matter. Lack of this attention is the overwhelming reason why we today see warbling virtues more fine than old ivory (?) What makes us doubt the salvation of João Nunes Borges with his cargo of books if not this: his conceit in his own understanding which led him to believe that he could cope with the most subtle figures of rhetoric and the varieties of meaning in the sentences of the great writers, /f.115/ Livy, Pliny, Plato, etc, although he could never understand himself? How can such men give their attention to the most obscure legal writers and yet never grasp Pulvis est, "dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return" [Genesis 3:19]? How is it that one can meet today in the earthly city those whom the Chroniclers of Salvation call "wise in their day", who are engaged in dreaming about great fantasies and are carried away by ecstatic contemplation, yet without perceiving (the truth), without acquiring even the ABC of the true philosophy of divine election? Who am I, and who is God? O music divine, O meditation for the most barren place! O bouquet of myrrh for glorious Bernard, bringing such benefit to trade, to the table, to conversation, by night and day, in all seasons! Happy he who, in the most secluded corner of his home or in public places, has no company other than the divine fragrance and sweetness of flowers so dainty! He who like Bernard lays them not only across his breast but across the reality of his soul, how he renounces all else, how he despises what is most highly valued here on earth, in order to be sure of gaining the eternal years of the King of Prophets! Nowadays there is no ignorance, so why say more when I am addressing the learned?

(q) "Though Coniah ... were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck him hence". See Jeremiah, chapter 22 [v.24]. Rings on the fingers of the All Highest in hell, etc.

(r) In search of salvation.

(s) And voyages by sea.

(t) At sea, on land, elsewhere, if I hear from the cabin, the best picture like those of hell, with which these places are prettified.
The science of material things now fills not only the cities but the
towns, the hills, (even) the barren places. In our day there is no
ignorance anywhere. The most savage natives of Ethiopia can account for
the sky and the earth. No-one who hears me can deny this: I have tested
the matter this very moment. I saw an idolater and heard from him deep
theology. "The Most High holds all in his hand, life, death, health,
riches, honour". How then does it come about that He is despised, that
men deny Him, that men sell Him each day in the market place of the world
for less than did Judas? How can this be? Do you wish to know? It is
because God has entered into the understanding, into the porch of the Temple
of Solomon. You will see another man ask the number of the tribe of Israel,
and when and why God scattered them, and where they went, and which tribe
he brought out of Egypt. You will see the theologian speak of the marvels
of the All Powerful, and discuss with great subtlety of exposition and a
thousand different arguments the divine attributes and the ineffable
procesion of divine persons. You will see the canonist memorise /f.115r/
a computerful of decisions and decrees of the sacred councils. You will
see the jurist full to the brim with his own code, his Infortiate, his ff.,
his extravagances, etc. Here God enters the courtyard of the soul, the
understanding and the memory. Seek out the doctor or anatomist, search
through all civil states, it seems that malice has made its stronghold in
the poor soul! You will see it enthroned here in all majesty in the city-
dweller, in the townsman, in the learned and in the ignorant. This is the
enemy that destroys all, because it has an urge to do this. With this
weapon alone, in the same way as if it had an armoury of weapons, it has
no fear of being deprived of its unjust possession. But this is enough for
those who wanted to know, and it forms a suitable conclusion for chapter 25.