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LETTER FROM FATHER BALTASAR BARREIRA

TO FATHER JOÃO ÁLVARES.

Biguba, 14 May, 1605

Pax Christi etc.

Everything which Your Reverence has said to me in your letter of 24th July I believe to be the case, but I also think that if we consider the reasons there are for the Society to reach out to this heathen people and be made use of in converting them and showing them the way to Heaven, we shall find that this undertaking has been no less properly instituted, nor is it less to the glory of God, than those others which some regard as extremely glorious. When I see how everyone despises this undertaking because it concerns wretched people in a hot land which lacks the compensations other lands have, and in particular those of temporal honour and property with which many are moved to cultivate other nations inferior to this in capacity and understanding, I understand that if the ^{Society} ~~Company~~ does not take charge of this conversion, it will remain in perpetual oblivion, as it has been until now. I touch on some of this in the letter I am writing to our people in Portugal, a copy of which I am advising should be sent to our Padre Geral. I had intended to discuss this matter specifically and separately, but I have not done so, partly because I first wanted to experience for myself what I proposed to write about and partly because the many tasks I always have, especially during Lent, have not allowed me the opportunity; but I shall do it, God willing, when I can, and together with this I shall complete an already-begun description of the kingdoms of this Guinea known to the Portuguese. And I shall state what I have learned about the enslavement of these blacks, because there are many difficult points involved which ought to be closely examined.

What Your Reverence says about the Province, that it is a very heavy burden (?) and that help cannot be sent to so many places, I can see this very well, and I could already see it when I was in Portugal. Yet I must also confess that it pains my heart to see so many thousands of souls going to hell for lack of a remedy, souls located so near to Portugal and souls already under instruction by the cacizes of the cursed sect of Mohammed. If the Society does not provide them with the remedy, no one else will, ^{as} I have already said. I also recognise that for this place any member who has virtue and good intentions will suffice, and that brothers who have enough Latin to be priests but have not been trained (?) can be sent, for here they will be learning (how to deal with) cases of conscience, and will become accustomed to the land while they help the padres to catechize and give religious instruction, etc; and when they are ready for it, they can take /f.292v/ orders on the Island. Also, Members (of the Society) from other Provinces, such as Italians, Aragonese and Spaniards, can come to these parts because there are lay people here from all these nations and the land suits them well. Above all, I add this: that, if the saying is true: "Quien todo lo miro, nunca con buyes arco", ["He who looks at it all never makes off with the oxen"] then we should leave something to the Providence of God, trusting in His infinite goodness; and since in this work we are seeking only His glory and honour, He will give to the Society the members and the capacity to carry it out.

In spite of what I have said, I am writing a letter to the Padre Provincial in which I state the doubts I have about our establishing ourselves in these parts, and I am asking him to send a copy to the General. Although I could have baptized many of the subjects of the kings of these parts, I have not done this, nor will I do so until His Reverence replies saying whether I should start this work, so that for the reason that it will be he gives the orders the Society will

be as it were pledged and obliged not to forsake the Christian community we form here. The King of Biguba, in whose lands we are staying, already wishes to become a Christian, and I have written a letter to His Majesty about this, a copy of which I shall try to send with the present one. But I shall not baptize him until His Majesty responds with the solution I am suggesting in a letter I am writing to him, and until our Padre Geral declares his wishes to me. Thus I intend to go forward slowly and carefully in this matter, so that time and experience may demonstrate which course of action will be to the greatest glory of God and the good of the Society.

Following the letter from Your Reverence (to which I am replying), on the 12th of the present month of May I received another letter of yours dated the 10th of November, and this greatly comforted me. In it Your Reverence again recommended to me the same course as in the previous one. Since I have already replied regarding the matter and the ship which is to take the letters is ready to sail, and I am exhausted with writing, I will go on no more. May Your Reverence send me your blessing from afar, and commend me to the Lord in your holy sacrifices and prayers.

From Guinea and the port of Biguba, 14 May 1605

Baltasar Barreira.

It will be necessary for Your Reverence to show this to the General, unless (?) there arrives with it the copy of a letter which I am writing to the Padre Provincial about the state of this mission, which letter so as not to repeat the same things and because time will not allow me (to do otherwise), I am asking the Padre to send to His Reverence the General.

Overleaf: To Father João Álvares, Assistant for the Province of Portugal of the Society of Jesus, at Rome. (1)

(1) The whole letter is an autograph.

