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LETTER FROM FATHER BALTASAR BARREIRA TO FATHER JOÃO ALVARES, ASSISTENTESerra Leoa, 4 March 1607

(ARSJ, Lus. 74. ff. 64-5)

/f.64/

Pax Christi etc.

On 16 ~~June~~^{January} 1607, I received in Serra Leoa Your Reverence's letter of 10 November 1605, and with it very great comfort, on account of the mercy which God shows us in giving Your Reverence life and health, for the good of our Province and of the whole Society. May it be His will to preserve them as we all wish.

The matter Your Reverence indicated to Father Colaço that he should deal with at court, concerning the seminary for educating certain individuals from this Guinea, and from Congo and Angola, this went well, I am informed from Portugal, and it was to some extent accepted, but Martim Gonçalves thought it better to establish the seminary within the conquistas themselves. My own view is that the blacks are not suited to living together in a community, either by themselves or with whites, and that it will be easier to educate them here, where it can be done at little cost, by their living at home with their parents or relatives.

The news of this Serra Leoa that Your Reverence seeks I sent in August last year, together with the description of the kingdoms of this coast, and also (a paper discussing) points in relation to the enslavement of these blacks, a matter so full of doubts however approached that it is impossible to take up any position on it other than this: either it should continue as it has until now, or else the trade should be completely prohibited. I say this because the normal practice is to sell the blacks on account of offences they commit, either the blacks themselves or their relatives and

others born in the same place, and this practice is like a law among all of them; and although it can sometimes happen that they are sold without committing any offence or that the offence they commit does not justify slavery, it is impossible to check on these points..

I also wrote to Your Reverence concerning certain difficulties hindering conversion, which I have since considered to be of little or no consequence. Pedro Alvarez Pereira, knowing, it seems, that I was in these kingdoms of Serra Leoa and that I had written about the land and its disposition for receiving our Holy Faith, concluded his grant of this conquista and by a fast caravel sent me a certified copy of the grant and a letter containing a thousand kind words and assurances, etc. But what I most value is a paragraph which says: "I have rejoiced greatly at the fruit that you, Reverend Father, have gathered in these parts, (a success) which I never doubted because of the great virtue I always recognized in you. Now I hold in higher esteem the award of these lands that His Majesty has made me, since with your help I trust that they will be of increased Service to God and His Majesty and of increased benefit to me. As regards the Society Your Reverence can be sure that no one will serve it better or longer than myself, and thus I put everything in Your Reverence's hands, so that you may guide all as if it were your own, etc." In another paragraph he says: "I shall be very happy for the Society to establish a college in that settlement, and I shall help in this and share out the lands suitable for its maintenance. You, Reverend Father must advise me what ought to be done and how it can be effected." I did not want to repeat what he said about myself, but have done so in order to make sense of the rest of his remarks; and because, while I do not give much ^{we}right to his commendation as far as (my own contribution) is concerned, since I realize my own (limited) due, I value it inasmuch as it commends the ^SSociety, whose well-being and enlargement I desire. By means of whatever Your Reverence may write to me on this point, may God show us the way

to achieve the greatest glory. /f.64v/ The messages that Pedro Alvares Pereira sent me have made these blacks understand that we were speaking the truth, and a new fervour to receive our holy faith has taken hold of them, for until now they have been on their guard.

May it be the Lord's will to prosper these beginnings, to His glory and honour, and to keep Your Reverence with us over many years for our comfort.

From this Serra Leoa, 4 March 1607,

Baltasar Barreira.

Address: To Father João Alvares, of the Society of (Jesus),
Assistant to Our Padre-Geral, Rome.



