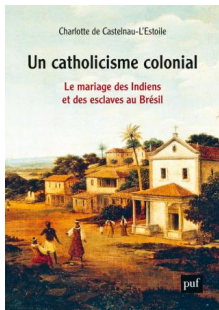


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Charlotte de Castelnau-L'Estoile  
Un catholicisme colonial

Review by: Maria Teresa Fattori



**Authors:** Charlotte de Castelnau-L'Estoile

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The marriage of the native Brazilian (free or enslaved people) and African slaves is, in the analysis of Charlotte de Castelnau-L'Estoile, the central element of the Brazilian pro-slave society and one of the main subjects of discussion between the local (or Brazilian) and the central (or Roman) Catholicism. Conversion and marriage were the two ways, on the one hand, imposed by the colonial authorities and, on the other hand, used by natives of America and Africa to build and became part of the colonial society, the white Catholic Brazilian society (p. 19). The point of view of the French historian is the history of the evangelization and religion of a colonial society, between the incorporation of the natives and the maintenance of their subordination. A wide range of sources have been taken into consideration as basis of this monography: juridical documents from the Brazilian archives collecting controversies on marriages; theological treatises; reports and doubts presented to the Roman Papal archives (at the Congregations of the Holy Office and de Propaganda Fide); but also travels reports, chronicles of geography, official history of the Portuguese Empire, letters between missionaries and superiors of the Society of Jesus and, in minor part, of the Capuchins between the sixteenth and the eighteenth century. The author collects information on the local wedding custom too, through the missionary ethnology, as well as she presents the most important canonical decisions, established by the Papacy, changing the traditional position on the marriage of the unfaithful newly converted, called, as she says, eternal neophytes («éternels neophytes»). When the sources suggest the connection, the situation of native Americans and enslaved Africans in Brazil is compared with the doubts and debate dedicated to the Christian neophytes in Japan, Spanish America, and Congo.

The ten chapters are organized in a first part dedicated at the issue of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries: the early sixteenth-century choice on wedding union between Portuguese and French males and Brazilian females; the Tridentine and Roman intervention on the sacramental marriage, ending with the Constitution *Romani Pontificis providentia* (1571) promulgated by

Pius V, which changed the traditional position on the indigenous marriages; the dossier of Évora debating the Brazilian weddings between canon law and natural law; the doubts on the weddings of the enslaved population in Brazil; the background of the constitution of Gregory XIII, *Populis ac nationibus* (1585) dealing with the marriage of the converted and baptized slaves. In the second part, concentrated on the turning point of the eighteenth century, four chapters investigate the freedom to marry conceded at the enslaved faithful in Brazil, through the analysis of the seventy-five causes decided by the diocesan tribunal of Rio de Janeiro, between 1680 and 1720; the juridical condition for marrying granted to slaves and the mixed marriages; the permanent condition of neophytes of the natives. A chapter is dedicated at the comprehension of the category of «neophyte» no longer referred to newly baptized Catholics (etymologically new to the faith), but classifying people of indigenous or mixed blood, colored-skin people in whose body European, Indians, or African blood was mixed to varying degrees and combination. In the strict sense, a neophyte was a baptized person who was not born Catholic, or one baptized who had mixed blood in their body.

The richness of the essay is unquestionable and this book keeps much of its promise: the principal thesis is demonstrated with appropriate clarity due to the comparative approach chosen as its method. At least four coordinates are constantly entangled with one another: the Brazilian situation with its social, geographical and administrative peculiarities; the Roman perspective; the changing canon laws over native and enslaved faithful in the considered period; the pastoral pedagogy developed by the missionary actors which had found expression in theological treaties and sacramental doubts; finally, the analysis of seventy-five marriage cases present in the archive of Rio de Janeiro between 1680 and 1720. Some points are definitively clarified by Castelnuovo-L'Etoile, such as the changing process of colonization based on various marriage policies, from a first project to unite Natives with Europeans on an equal footing, then changed in a project of domination based on the imposition of the European-Tridentine form of marriage. In that last phase, various pedagogical stages gradually imposed the Christian monogamy (pp. 42, 72, 76), but the Tridentine language was also spoken by the slaves and *negro* actors. Also important is the use of the proto-ethnography of the missionaries transmitting their knowledge on *Tupian marriages*, collected in the six Jesuits dossier of Évora (years 1580s), where theological knowledge is connected with the examination of the local wedding tradition of the Brazilian natives.

*Un catholicisme colonial* demonstrates the variety of religious, juridical, local criterions used for defining personhood, along with place of birth and skin color (cf. p. 52: «Negros, negras, Indiens, Indiennes, Blancs, libres, esclaves, hommes, femmes, chrétiens nouvellement convertis, Portugais, Portugaises, mameluco, mameluca ... : les citations données précédemment montrent que dans cette société luso coloniale, les individus sont définis par différents critères, renvoyant à leur statut juridique, à leur lieu de naissance, à leur couleur de peau, à leur statut religieux»; but see also pp. 394-400). Those concepts of personhood are presented in parallel with the different positions of the various faithful in the colonial Church. The essay shows how much native Brazilians were active in their integration in the Portuguese-colonial society, being not only a dominated population, but also, thanks to the mixed marriages, using Catholicism as an instrument for their social promotion. The permanent link between the Brazilian center and the Roman center, their exchanges, relations, and reciprocal fidelity were one of the most important results of this research, an undoubted demonstration of the polycentricity of Catholicism in the early modern period. The Brazilian Catholicism was built through the alliance between religion and colonization; therefore, the clerical intermediation created the basis of the slave society, guaranteeing its religious and social dimension. Christian sacramental marriage was one of the most important forms imposed by the Church to native faithful, but it was also used by the natives as instrument of freedom, for the free consensus and choice they received and asserted as Catholic faithful. Native Brazilians, enslaved women and men, subalterns as they were, demonstrated capacity for action, agency, not remaining dominated-passive people. The complex and multifaced reception of the ecclesiastical norms in matter of marriage was characterized by a dialectic between top-down and bottom-up negotiations. The marriage open to slaves in Brazil since the sixteenth century, was a religious marriage only, without civil rights, but Castelnuovo demonstrated that it played its part in the integration of the enslaved people in the catholic society, as an open horizon for social ascension, as long as and until the institution of slavery functioned (cf. Chapter 8, *Rio de Janeiro 1680-1720*, pp. 357-403; *Conclusion*, pp. 501-506).

The central part of the essay focuses on the position of the slave faithful in the Brazilian pro-slaver society: the theological reflection on the marriage for slaves, conducted by the Jesuits in the 1580s, was the proof of the ecclesiastical acceptance of the legitimacy of slavery in the Catholic moral theology. The rich and complex analysis of the fifty-three cases of conscience is the core of the fourth chapter. The author partially edits in French translation some doubts and their solutions together with her comments, but it should be useful a complete edition, in the original languages, of those amazing documents, found in the dossier of Évora and dated in 1580s. The background of the *Populis ac nationibus* of Gregory XIII and the history of the reception of that important papal constitution, disciplining the marriage of African slaves in the Portuguese Empire of Brazil, presents the connection and the capacity of the so-called periphery to obtain decisions from the Roman center for local needs. The multi-faced Catholic system was a complex and overlapped system in modern times, where the diocesan structure and the missionary network were flanked by the Roman system of Congregations, gradually becoming the alternative to the local decisions but, at the same time, the authority confirming the local decisions.

In the second part of the monography, the author shows the connection between the Jesuit sources examined in the first part and the diocesan legislation. In the preliminary remarks, the author presents the distinction between the stable diocesan Church in Brazil, under the ordinaries' leadership, and the missionary Church in a position of avant-garde and cohabiting with the diocesan Church in Portuguese case. Although the Church in Brazil remained a missionary Church, without a real metropolitan center capable of exercising jurisdiction over an enormous territory, the synodal legislation on matter of sacraments for the slaves has been taken into consideration. Under Archbishop Sebastião Monteiro da Vide, the metropolitan see of Bahia produced a systematization of constitutions for the

Brazilian Portuguese Church, printed the common decisions taken during the meetings of the Brazilian clergy, where one suffragan bishop was also present (Session 1 was held in São Salvador in 1704 and another one in 1707).

Although the bibliography is very rich (cf. pp. 523-546), some fundamental contributions by both Italian and German scholars are missing<sup>[1]</sup>. A second criticality consists in a sort of blindness which prevents the author from seeing how the choices made in respect of the new Christian of Jewish origin in Portugal were the model for the creative solutions put into effect with regard to the slaves and native faithful of America and Africa. In her monography, Castelnau-L'Estoile concentrates on the question of marriage, underestimating the fact that all the sacraments were the way in which the ecclesiastical authorities accepted and acknowledged the juridical condition of members of the Church and, at the same time, of Christian society. It is true that the author sometimes opens up brief glimpses on this view (with short reference to the problem of baptism and Holy Order), but a global sacramental perspective might allow for a better understanding of the position of black slaves, natives and colored faithful in the *longue durée*. Slavery was accepted as a human institution by the cardinals of the Holy Office following the Medieval theological doctrine on the legitimate right of slavery. The Atlantic slave trade and the conditions of Africans in America were situations that were not perceived as different from Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages by Holy Office, until the 1686 decrees, that Castelnau-L'Estoile knows but whose importance she evidently underestimates (cf. M. T. Fattori, "*Licere - Non licere*". *La legittimità della schiavitù nelle decisioni della Sede apostolica romana tra XVII e XIX secolo* in «Rivista storica italiana» 132, 2020, 2, pp. 393-436). Once the diversity of slavery in the modern age had been ascertained, missionaries gradually took note of the inapplicability of the Tridentine sacramentary to slaves and they used the Iberian solution for managing native diversity. The comparison of the method of evangelization used by the Jesuits in the Southern Spain and in America allows us to focus on points in common: a special pastoral care for non-native Catholics with a particular pedagogical approach, the use of local languages and memorization techniques, teaching based on essential content, and a system of punishments and rewards. The same method was used by the Society of Jesus in its pastoral care of Moorish/Moriscos as for the Indios. The Southern Spain norms were the basis for the subsequent decrees promulgated by the Spanish-American provincial councils dealing with native Americans; the first four councils of Goa were the base of the missionary code of the Portuguese Empire as well. The outcast of India's exclusion was based on reasons that had several points in common with the Iberian concern for the purity of blood and the reserve about certain unalterable characteristics of the new Christians of Jewish origin.

Despite these reservations, this book is invaluable. The author maneuvers with great dexterity within theological-canonistic contents and highlights how economic and social situations were tightly linked in the religious marriage of 'Indians' and slaves in Portuguese Brazil. With the cornerstone set by this essay, it is possible to seize a future perspective capable of highlighting the pastoral life of the native Americans, black and colored faithful of non-European origin, using the red thread of the sacraments. Questions and doubts dealing with sacraments for slaves touched on peripheral areas of a Catholic Church still centered on the standard of ancient Christianity. But that 'peripheral' Church was nevertheless capable of producing its own normative code, every time the Tridentine form of marriage (and sacraments) could not fully accommodate those marginal members that could not be Catholic along Tridentine lines. In the same period, central institutions in Madrid, Lisbon, Rome and in the New World increasingly disagreed about the rules and the obligations for the newly converted Catholics in the American, African and Asian churches. Admission to confession, eucharist, priesthood and to the religious orders for New Christian native Americans or *mestizos* was equally a matter of divisions and discussions. Seen in that perspective, the prohibitions to give the eucharist, confess and order natives and colored people were rooted in a kind of genetic determinism, preventing baptized persons that were the result of crossbreeding from being considered as fully Catholic and causing them to be regarded as permanent «neophytes».

[1] For example, the classical essays of G. Imbruglia, *L'invenzione del Paraguay. Studio sull'idea di comunità tra Seicento e Settecento*, Napoli, Bibliopolis, 1987; G. Gliozzi, *Adamo e il Nuovo Mondo. La nascita dell'antropologia come ideologia coloniale dalle genealogie bibliche alle teorie razziali (1500-1700)*, Firenze, La nuova Italia, 1977; more recent studies, such as the monography of A. Tomassini, *La fondazione religiosa di un impero coloniale. Manuel da Nóbrega (1517-1570)*, Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2009; F. Alfieri, *Nella camera degli sposi. Tomás Sánchez, il matrimonio, la sessualità (secoli XVI-XVII)*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2010; the recent survey on the confessional culture P. Walter - G. Wassilowsky (Hrsg.), *Das Konzil von Trient und die katholische Konfessionskultur (1563-2013). Wissenschaftliches Symposium aus Anlass des 450. Jahrestages des Abschlusses des Konzils von Trient*, Freiburg i. Br. 18-21. September 2013, Münster, Aschendorff, 2016; C. Cristellon, *Marriage, the Church, and its Judges in Renaissance Venice, 1420-1545* (Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). Among the recent investigations of the complex relation between papacy and slave trade, the author misses the analysis of P. Onyemechi Adiele, *The Popes, the Catholic Church and the Transatlantic Enslavement of Black Africans 1418-1839* (Hildesheim - Zürich - New York, G. Olms, 2017).