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The Jesuit Republic and Brother Care in *The Mission*: An Allegory of the Conquest

JAY HANSFORD C. VEST

An award-winning film, *The Mission* presents an allegorical treatment of colonial drama in the Americas.¹ Although the opening credits to the film state that “the historical events, represented in this story are true, and occurred around the borderlands of Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil in the year 1750,” there is considerable evidence that the scope of this film is greater than the year 1750. Depicting the fabled “Jesuit Republic,” *The Mission* dramatizes historical events that span a period of more than 150 years, from 1610 to 1768. In scope and deed these events bear much that is relevant to the invasion and conquest of the Americas. Minding this premise, there is reason to suspect that *The Mission* dramatically conveys an allegory of the Conquest.² In doing so, it frames the narrative in an allegorical sense of “brother care” or “neighbor love” that constitutes the *agape* doctrine of the synoptic Gospels.

In approaching *The Mission* I propose to turn our attention to what I will call the archaeology of the film. By *archaeology* I am suggesting the foundations, both historical and imagined, in the filmmaker’s craft. As Father Daniel Berrigan, S.J., adviser on the film, has pointed out, a “two hour film attempts the impossible in summary of two hundred fifty years of achievement.”³ Film cannot be judged against the complexities that govern traditional historical analysis and presentation. Minding this consideration, I present, first, a historical sketch of the Jesuit Republic and, second, a critical analysis of the film.

HISTORY OF THE CONQUEST

In order to appreciate *The Mission*, it is helpful to review the historical themes that engendered the Conquest and, subsequently, the Jesuit Republic. Following landfall in the Americas and his initial observations of the Natives, Columbus wrote: “They should be good and intelligent servants, for I see

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that they say very quickly everything that is said to them; and I believe that they would become Christians very easily, for it seemed to me that they had no religion.”⁴ Columbus’s remarks manifest a conclusion that has dominated Western intellectual attitudes and governmental actions toward Native peoples throughout world history. Historian Frederick Turner has characterized the Columbian impact on Native America as “the Western Spirit against the wilderness”: “the coming of European civilization to the wildernesses of the world is a spiritual story. To me it is the story of a civilization that had substituted history for myth as a way of understanding life. It was precisely this substitution that enabled Europeans to explore the most remote places of the globe, to colonize them, and to impose their values on the native populations.”⁵

The exploitation and depletion of Native populations following Columbus’s penetration of the Americas is vividly depicted in Bartolomé de las Casas’s *Apologética Historia*. On the island of Española (modern Haiti and Dominican Republic) alone, Las Casas estimates that between 1494 and 1508 nearly eight million souls perished—slain in war, sent to Castile as slaves, or consumed in the mines and at other labor. In summation, historian Kirkpatrick Sale noted that “Spanish surveys of Española taken in 1508, 1510, 1514, and 1518 all show the same rough picture, of a population then *under 100,000* and declining precipitously. The most detailed census, the *repartimiento* of 1514, listed just under 22,000 adults that after official revision was expanded to 27,800. Noting a reduction rate of 99 percent, Sale emphatically states the facts of this genocide: “*from 8 million to 28,000 in just over twenty years.*”⁶ Astonished at this death and destruction of the aborigines, Las Casas soberly remarked, “Who of those born in future centuries will believe this? I myself who am writing this and saw it and know most about it can hardly believe that such was possible.”⁷ In fact by 1542 Las Casas, who was there at the time, reported that only two hundred Tainos remained on Española, and these were probably the last Natives surviving anywhere in the islands.⁸ Projected across the Americas in incidents one after another, this wanton destruction of human life, the Conquest as we know it, constitutes the greatest episode of genocide in world history.

Initiating the Conquest, the Spanish were brutal in their application of colonial and papal decrees on the aboriginals. “It was the Spaniards,” according to Lewis Hanke, “who first realized the necessity to work out Christian laws to govern their relations with the Indians they encountered.”⁹ Speculation concerning the origin of American Indians and questions as to whether they were men or savage beasts plagued Spanish and European authorities as they initiated the Conquest. The invasion of the Americas was foreshadowed by the accumulated events and experiences that grew out of Christian expansion in Europe. Fueling a savagism dogma, notions of the “wild man” abounded in the literal and noncontextual reading of European and Middle Eastern mythologies.¹⁰ As a result, Spanish captains pursued the Conquest while fully expecting to encounter monsters and mythical beings such as giants, pygmies, dragons, griffins, white-haired boys, bearded ladies, human beings adorned with tails, headless creatures with eyes in their stomachs or breasts, and other fabulous folk characters. These were the savage or

monstrous races of men that filled the pages of bestiaries and captured the popular imagination during the Middle Ages.¹¹

Although the Papal Donation of 1493 had declared Indians to be men, Pope Alexander VI, with the advice of the archbishop of Seville, decreed that the Indians should serve the Spaniards and that this vassalage was in accordance with law, human and divine. Armed with their folk bestiaries and fertile imaginations, the Spaniards felt justified in the Conquest, and this policy was later rationalized in the Great Debate at Valladolid, 1550–51, when Aristotle's theory of "natural slavery" was applied to American Indians. Aristotle had held that some men born of inferior race were natural slaves and that they constituted a condition of "animate possession" when held by a superior race. It was this authority that gave the Spaniards rights of natural lordship and permanent superiority over the American aboriginals.¹²

Preceding the Great Debate, in November 1505, King Ferdinand asserted the state's sovereignty over the Americas when referencing the 1493 Papal Donation and declared himself to be the "perpetual administrator by apostolic authority." To this effort, on 6 June 1511, Ferdinand charged Diego Columbus that the Indians be baptized and instructed in "Our holy Catholic faith, for this is the principal foundation upon which we have based our conquest of these regions."¹³ The papal bulls of Alexander VI and Julius II conferred special authority on the Spanish Crown, granting greater power for the direct administration of church affairs in the Americas. Hanke observed that "the acceptance by the crown of the obligation to provide for the Christianization of the Indian led to a theory of empire and colonial policy in which ecclesiastics, who had always been imparted in royal councils, became trusted advisors to the crown and to the Council of the Indies, the principal administrative body for ruling America" (2, 27). Despite treaties, laws, rules and requirements designed by the state's ecclesiastical advisers, the Conquest in its wanton brutality and waste challenged the moral authority of Christendom. As a result there emerged a struggle for moral justice that championed Christian precepts in the relations between peoples. According to Hanke, "This attempt became basically a spirited defense of the rights of the Indians, which rested on two of the most fundamental assumptions a Christian can make: namely, that all men are equal before God, and that a Christian has a responsibility for the welfare of his brothers no matter how alien or lowly they may be" (1). In the course of the Conquest it is this struggle between Crown and church, as they seek to exercise their respective authority over the Natives, that *The Mission* vividly depicts in allegorical drama.

Seeking to impose a definite tribute on the Indians of Española, Columbus in 1499 imposed the *encomienda* system, which thereafter became a legal institution in colonial Spanish America.¹⁴ The theory of the *encomienda*, according to Hanke, involved Spanish commendations of land and authority to the Crown's vassals, who became *encomenderos*. These grants "gave the Spaniards the right to exact labor and tribute from the Indians" (19). In return, the *encomenderos* were obliged to provide religious instruction for their Indians and to protect them. The *encomenderos* also, as the system "developed, came to owe an obligation to the King, that of defending the

land" (19). As this legal system took its toll on the Natives, a dispute arose in the intervening years between 1503 to 1512, generating the first serious discussion of the basis for Spanish rule in America, as well as questioning the right of the Spaniards to profit from Indian labor.¹⁵

Communities within the church, specifically the Jesuits, opposed the *encomiendas* and enslavement of the Natives and began the organization of "reductions" or tightly disciplined missions that were practically an Indian state ruled by the Jesuits.¹⁶ These missions were in effect *de facto* reservations grounded in Christian conversion and church authority. In a manner of speaking, they were treaty lands according the Natives a fiduciary relationship with the church.¹⁷ These reductions or missions had emerged in criticism of the *encomenderos*, but as a result of their competition with them, these powerful vassals quickly developed complaints against the church, alleging profiteering and defiance of the Crown.

In *The Mission* it is these reductions and the moral treatment—as derived from the Christian precepts of "brother care" and "neighbor love"—of the Natives that is the centerpiece of the dramatic conflict. Herein the moral combatants are, first, the Crown with respect to its vassals, the *encomenderos*; and, second, the church with its Jesuit order of priests. The morality play is that of a simple good-versus-evil contest. The heroic Jesuit priests are good, whereas the greedy and depraved *encomenderos* are evil. In this struggle for control over the Natives and their lands, it is only through conversion of the Indians to Christianity that enables the Crown to lay a claim to sovereignty over the Americas. This foundation for the Conquest of the Americas is based on the precepts of the holy Catholic faith.

The history of the conflict is rooted in a long-standing border dispute between Spanish Paraguay (including present-day Argentina and Uruguay) and Portuguese Brazil. In 1493 Pope Alexander VI had proposed a dividing line that was later formalized in the Treaty of Tordesillas.¹⁸ By Spanish interpretation, southern Brazil was viewed as a narrow strip along the coast, while the Portuguese claimed most of the La Plata region deep within sixteenth-century Paraguay.¹⁹ A result of vague demarcation, the border dispute provoked warfare, mostly undeclared, between the colonial powers for nearly two centuries. Persisting until the two Crowns were united, Spain and Portugal at long last agreed to settle their colonial border dispute. Following three years of negotiation, a Boundary Treaty, *Tratado de Limites*, was signed in Madrid on 13 January 1750.²⁰

With the *Tratado de Limites* a crisis emerged among the Guaraní reductions composing the "Jesuit Republic." Since the first mission, founded in 1610, the Jesuits had created a "republic" among the Guaraní in Paraguay comprising some thirty towns, or reductions.²¹ Seven of the reductions were located within the disputed territory, and by order of the treaty these were to be turned over to the Portuguese, who offered no legal protection to the Indians and their benefactors.²² The impact on the Guaraní is apparent in clause 16 of the treaty: "From the *doctrines* or villages which his Catholic Majesty cedes on the eastern bank of the Uruguay river the missionaries will leave with all their movable property, taking with them the Indians to settle

in Spanish territories. The said Indians may also take their movable property and the arms, powder and ammunition, which they possess. In this way the villages, with their church, houses, buildings and property and their ownership of the land shall be given to the Portuguese."²³

As soon as the terms of the treaty were disclosed, controversy ensued, leading to armed revolt and outright war when the Guaraní resisted the Portuguese takeover. It is this crisis that serves as the dramatic vehicle propelling the film; however, there remains a substantial history that merits consideration before examining the movie.

When the doctrine of "natural slavery" prevailed at the Great Debate in Valladolid in 1550–51, it provided a foundation for imposed servitude of the Native peoples. Open to wide interpretation, the doctrine was used by the Portuguese to justify slavery, while the Spanish forced a labor tribute system on the Indians. As a result, slavery was legal in Portuguese territory, and although illegal in Spanish possessions, it was the de facto arrangement among the *encomenderos*.²⁴ Each of the colonial powers had their own means and institutions to possess and advance their American frontier. In the French possessions there were fur traders and "Black Robes," or Jesuit missionaries; the English had their backwoodsmen and military might; the Portuguese relied on *mameluccos*, or slave hunters; and the Spanish used both conquistadors and missionaries.²⁵ In the subjugation of the Natives, the conquistadors initially imposed a tribute system on those Indians closest to the respective plantations. Despite the illegal status of slavery in Spanish territory, this tribute system quickly reduced Indians to slaves, and they were worked to death on these *encomiendas*.²⁶ The papal bull of Paul III had legitimated this doctrine of tribute, known as *servicio personal*, in 1537 as an attempt to condemn enslavement of South American Indians. In theory the *servicio* was a tribute involving the performance of day labor to the governor, who might delegate it to an *encomendero*. Notwithstanding the papal intentions, "it was said that tens of thousands of Indians had been taken from the *encomenderos* only to be subjected to a harsher servitude."²⁷

Charged with the mission to Paraguay, Padre Diego de Torres gave orders in 1608 to free all Indians working on the *encomienda* attending the Jesuit College in Asunción. By 1609 Torres intended to found an Indian republic far removed from Spanish settlements; however, in 1612 he connected the "republic" to the Spanish Crown.²⁸ The mission at San Ignacio was first established in January 1610.²⁹ Loreto followed it in 1611,³⁰ and these were the initial reductions in Guairá. By 1680 there were twenty-two missions in the "republic," and another eight were added during the intervening years before the crisis.³¹

The notion of a "reduction," derived from the Spanish *reducir*, to reduce into townships, is first found in a document of the Spanish Crown dated 29 March 1503 at Saragossa. It charged the officials in Española to bring all Indians into reductions, supplying clothing, church, priest, and school as a means of introducing them to "civilized life."³² As protected settlements, the reductions were intended to supply the humanism of the Jesuit fathers, as well as the goodwill of the Crown.³³ As they shifted from a gathering and hunting

economy to a sedentary way of life, the reductions brought cultural change to the Indians of Guairá. Organized around the Native communal system, the Jesuits acted as “town managers” in overseeing the townships.³⁴ The missions were further acclimatized to the Indian social order by relying on the authority of tribal *caciques*, or chiefs.³⁵ Operating in a sustainable economy, the thirty towns were self-sufficient, with workshops, farms, and cattle ranges.³⁶

Although the Jesuit intent with founding the mission reductions may be termed a noble act of Indian preservation in the face of colonial exploitation, it was not free of instrumental desire and utilitarian ethics. The Jesuits entertained grand designs dedicated to the “salvation of souls” in a “spiritual conquest.”³⁷ In their *Conquista Espiritual* the Jesuits “wanted souls for Christ” and were, thereby, motivated by a kind of “soul lust.”³⁸ Rather than practice an agape of selfless love or brother care, the Jesuits persecuted the Native shamans and those who continued to practice the traditional religion.³⁹

Mistaking the Guaraní as monotheists,⁴⁰ the Jesuits relied on a class of mixed-blood priests and novices who spoke the Indian language but misunderstood the traditional cosmologies and transformed them into a primitive theology. Indeed, the Jesuits found that the most effective way of winning the Indians to the Christian faith was by acquiring the ability to speak the Native tongue.⁴¹ Affirming this conclusion, the history of the Jesuit missions among the Guaraní is replete with a range of mixed-blood priests.⁴² Father Torres, who initiated the first reduction, was himself a *criollo*.⁴³ Several distinguished priests followed him, including Father Montoya, “a Peruvian creole,” and the “natural missionary” Father Roque González, a Guaraní creole.⁴⁴ The substantial efforts of Indian conversion were fueled and sustained by Native priests who lacked knowledge of the traditional religion but who retained their Native tongue.

As early as 1608 the Indians of the La Plata region were under the *encomienda servico* decree;⁴⁵ however, the Jesuit reduction begun at that time created a haven against the harsh servitude and slavery. Seeing the missions as a ready source of slaves, the São Paulo *bandeirantes*, or *mameluccos*, planned in September 1627 a *maloca*, or slave raid, against the reductions.⁴⁶ Later, in 1629, a *bandeira* of four hundred *mameluccos* attacked the reductions at San Antonio, San Miguel, and Jesus María. The following year, an even more terrible *maloca* came against the oldest missions of San Ignacio and Loreto.⁴⁷ As a result, in the years between 1628 and 1631 sixty thousand of the mission Indians were sold as slaves in the market at São Paulo.⁴⁸ Having arrived in Rio de Janeiro in 1628, the newly appointed governor of Asunción, Luis de Cépedes, aligned himself with the *mameluccos* at São Paulo. When Jesuit Father Montoya entertained him at Loreto and requested him to supply military aid to protect the reductions, “All the return he made was abusive language.”⁴⁹ As the plight of the mission Indians grew more desperate and the Jesuit pleas for military assistance went unheeded, several lay brothers organized an Indian militia. Having acquired a few muskets and having built others in the mission workshops, the Indian militia offered resistance when in 1636 the *mameluccos* raided the Tape region. Despite their efforts, the small militia was quickly overwhelmed, and

within six months three of the ten Tape reductions had been destroyed or abandoned. As a result, the fathers led twelve thousand refugees seventy miles across the mountains to safety along the Paraná, where more than two thousand new homes were erected to house them.⁵⁰

Under the leadership of Father Diego Alfaro the Jesuits continued their efforts to organize and train an Indian army.⁵¹ In 1640–41, when the “Paulistas” attacked the Uruguay region, a force of four thousand Indians equipped with only three hundred muskets, led by Brother Domingo de Torres, confronted them. They repelled some four hundred *mameluccos* and nearly three thousand Tupi Indians.⁵² The booty acquired from the Indians’ victory amounted to four hundred muskets, which were promptly added to the mission armory. When next the *mameluccos* came, in 1647, they met a more forcefully equipped and organized Indian army. In a decree signed by the Spanish king in 1642, he proposed arms for the Indians and placed charge of their defense with the Jesuit fathers.⁵³ Taking personal charge of the defense plans, Brother Claude Ruyer, a Fleming, organized the Indian militia. Each reduction was compelled to contribute a regiment of six companies of sixty men per company. The Indian soldiers were instructed and drilled in the art of war, and as a result the *malocas* ceased after 1651. Between 1610 and 1651, however, some three hundred thousand mission Indians had been enslaved as a result of the *malocas*.⁵⁴

Although the Indian army⁵⁵ was now a significant deterrent against further *malocas*, the Portuguese, emboldened by the 1713 treaty of Utrecht, made a raid on the “*vaqueria de los Pinares*,” which was the combined mission cattle reservation, where they drove away sixty thousand head.⁵⁶ Official support for the missions was lacking because of the competitive economic strength of the reductions, which put them at odds with the Spanish *encomenderos*.⁵⁷

Following a 1493 papal bull’s vague demarcation, the border between the Spanish and Portuguese dominions in the Indies was never clearly defined, and as a result it was the subject of nearly two centuries of contention. The mission territories stood at the heart of the contention, and when the Border Treaty of January 1750 was signed, it threatened the very existence of the missions. Moving the border nearly 270 miles farther east meant that Brazil became nearly twice its size, and the acquired territory included the Uruguay River, with seven Jesuit missions that were east of the river.⁵⁸ By the terms of the treaty, the Portuguese negotiator, Alexander de Gusmão, demanded the rich pastures of the subject Jesuit missions, their great herds of cattle, and the seven towns, with their inhabitants of more than thirty thousand Indians.⁵⁹ These treaty requirements plunged the region into the crisis that supplies the historical reference for the film.

Addressing the transfer of the seven mission reductions to Portugal, Francis Retz, the father general, penned an unrealistic letter that reached Paraguay in January 1751. The letter exhorted the Jesuits to unquestioned obedience and deemed it best if the Indians were already resettled when the royal commissar arrived. On receiving this letter, the provincial of Paraguay summoned the mission priests for a meeting at San Miguel in April 1751.⁶⁰ More than seventy missionaries were present when Father Querini read this

letter and its demands. This reading triggered a “Magna Junta” while the priests began to look for an alternative means of changing the royal mind. As a result, two procurators, Fathers Gervasoni and Arroyo, were dispatched, and in October they landed in Cadiz. Presenting their case in Madrid before Father José Altamirano, the procurator general, the Paraguay procurators were sternly rebuked. Citing their duty to the king, Father Altamirano read aloud Article XXI of the “tratado”: “From the towns or settlements east of the Uruguay river which His Catholic Majesty cedes, the missionaries shall leave with their effects and furniture taking with them the Indians in order to resettle them on other Spanish lands; and said Indians can take with them their movable goods and possessions, and the arms, powder, and ammunitions they have. In this manner the towns shall be handed over to the Crown of Portugal with all the houses, churches, and buildings and with the ownership of the lands.” In reply the fathers protested and questioned their ability to remove the thirty thousand Indians from their Native lands. Father Altamirano, however, directed them to obey the king’s command and added that they do so “under precept of holy obedience under pain of mortal sin.”⁶¹

Further complicating matters for the priests, Portugal refused to ratify the treaty lest one of its articles express the fear, which both Crowns held for Jesuit resistance. The treaty held the clause of mutual obligation to compel by force of arms the evacuation of the seven missions should such force be necessary. With this hint of reprisal, Father Altamirano once more cited the document, saying, “To further assure the promptest compliance he [the king] has named a ‘comissario General’ with absolute power over your Province. He chose for the task my brother, Father Lupe Luis Altamirano, the Rector of the College of Ecija, who has embarked for Buenos Aires with His Majesty’s Commisar for the execution of the treaty, the Marqués de Valdeliríos.” Afterward, the two procurators lowered their heads, with Father Carlos murmuring, “We know our duty may the Lord have pity on the Guaraníes.” Seeking further to avert the injustice, the procurators took their message to the king’s confessor in hopes that he might persuade the sovereign to relent. Noting that “the very lives of the Indians” were at stake, the confessor remarked, “You must obey!”⁶²

In the meantime, in December 1751 Father Lupe Luis Altamirano was appointed visitor plenipotentiary to South America. Before the arrival of Altamirano, Padre Nusdorffer, seeking ways to gain the Indians’ acceptance of the treaty, visited the seven towns. In his report to Altamirano, he created a misleading impression that the Indians were prepared to look for new lands elsewhere within the Spanish territory.⁶³ With each passing day the crisis deepened, growing more and more violent and threatening full-scale revolts well before Altamirano’s arrival.⁶⁴ When Altamirano arrived in Montevideo in 1752, he interpreted the evidence and concluded that the priests were working for a stalemate. Shortly thereafter he reported to the visconti, Marqués de Valdeliríos, the chief boundary commissioner: “There are two reasons for the inaction and opposition. . . . The first is the Fathers’ excessive and blind confidence that the treaty will come to nothing, the second, the firm and erroneous conviction confirmed by our theologians at Córdoba that

your precepts do not bind in conscience and consequently neither do mine.”⁶⁵ This report served to further bias the commissioners against the Jesuits and affirm the earlier opinion that the Indians were “putty in the hands of the missionaries.”⁶⁶ It likewise encouraged military action against the missions.

When Altamirano visited Yapeyú, San Borja, and Santo Tomé, of which only San Borja was among the seven towns, the Indians grew to hate him. In part this outcome was due to his wearing of lay dress and because his actions made them suspect that he was Portuguese. As a result, they fled terrified before him.⁶⁷ A cacique from San Miguel made it clear that they would not abandon their town, and increasingly they found solidarity with the other affected towns.⁶⁸ As the first demarcation party arrived at San Antonio, home of two hundred families and an estancia of San Miguel, sixty-eight armed Guaraní refused to let them pass.⁶⁹ Given a spurious report of “superior Indian forces,” the Marqué, residing in Buenos Aires, declared that the real rebels were the Jesuits.⁷⁰ In negotiations held on 22 February 1753 the Indians agreed to let the Spaniards pass but not the Portuguese. According to the exaggerated reports, the Indian resistance of sixty-eight had grown to an impossible army of eighty thousand, which was said to have been equipped with artillery and officered by Jesuit priests. Plenipotentiary Altamirano proceeded to discharge a battery of excommunications against his Jesuit brethren. He further denied that the Jesuits were to bring the Indians to prompt submission by denying them Mass and sacraments.⁷¹

Eighteen months after the first demarcation party, the Portuguese and Spanish again took the field but this time with an allied army of three thousand soldiers. During the interval the Guaraní, however, had been busy in their preparations for defense of their towns. They had intensified their crop production and harvest, prepared arrowheads from every piece of scrap metal they could find, rounded stones for slings, and the women had learned and practiced shooting. Despite Altamirano’s decree closing the churches, the caciques ordered new chapels to be built with special dedications to their cause, including banners, penitents, prayers, and litanies. At the outset of war in February 1754, a Guaraní force besieged Santo Amaro, a small Portuguese fort, which they captured in a month-long siege. With the revolt in progress Altamirano wrote the king, accusing the Jesuits of instigating the rebellion. Reinforced by thirty-eight hundred soldiers, now totaling sixty-eight hundred—forty-six hundred Spanish and twenty-two hundred Portuguese—the two imperial armies planned to march on Santa Tecla, an estancia of San Miguel, and from there advance jointly against the seven towns.⁷²

Facing this allied army, there were 1,680 disorganized Indians under the command of Sepé, who was ignorant of military tactics. His forces had few firearms and eight bamboo-cane cannons, which could be fired three times at most before becoming useless. The campaign began with a number of skirmishes, one of which took the life of Sepé, resulting in the appointment of an even less-experienced commander, Nicolás Neeguirú. At last, cornered in their trenches at Santa Tecla, the Guaraní army was slaughtered in a battle that lasted an hour and a quarter.⁷³ Indians killed numbered 1,511, which was the greater part of their army. Among the spoils were eight cannons, two

standards, a few firearms, lances, and arrows, with four statues of the saints and several musical instruments.⁷⁴

The Indians had stood to die rather than give up their land. In San Miguel, a town of seven thousand Indians and famous for its magnificent church and a row of fine buildings, the conquerors were astonished at the size of the place. One among them is said to have exclaimed, "Surely our people in Madrid are out of their senses to deliver up to the Portuguese this town which is second to none in Paraguay." Prepared to take charge of the rebellion, the Marqués de Cevallo arrived in Buenos Aires in November 1756, but he found a war that had ceased to even smolder, and there were no fabled Jesuit gold mines. In fact, the Portuguese showed no hurry in taking charge of the seven towns. With the subsequent death of the visconti in 1758, and the expiration of Altamirano's commission, the Jesuit fathers were declared innocent of disloyalty. The treaty was rescinded on 12 February 1761, with the seven towns becoming Spanish once again. By 1762, fourteen thousand Indians survived in the seven reductions, while the death toll was sixteen thousand.⁷⁵

ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE FILM

With the preceding historical sketch of the "Jesuit Republic," which *The Mission* dramatizes in cinematic allegory, we are prepared to consider the sustentative issues of the film. Although working separately, director Roland Joffé and playwright/scenarist Robert Bolt, in the Lean-Zimmerman tradition, matched their skills to the challenges of moral conscience in creating an epic film.⁷⁶ Combining their craft in *The Mission*, they have created a drama critical of the moral authority that accompanied the invasion of the Americas. Given the time limitation placed on the cinematic medium, a dramatic film must rely on the nuances of dialogue and the simulation of historic events within selected scenes. In this way history is composed with an amalgamation of events into dramatic allegory and simulacra. As a result, the degree of historical truth is relative to the craft, skill, and imagination of the writers and filmmakers. In the context of allegorical drama, film, as arresting art—an art that moves one to reflective meditation beyond desire—is often given to a moral or axiological message. These value considerations are necessarily interwoven within the storytelling art and cinematic scenes. Film is in this way allegorical, having much in common with myth.

These presiding themes of film criticism, that is, historical authenticity and moral valuation as they occur within the limits of cinematic drama, require careful articulation, and they demand much of the spectator. In this regard it should be recognized that there are three dimensions of criticism present in this text. First, there is criticism of historical accuracy within the limits of cinematic drama. In addition, the choice of historical events, as well as the amalgamation of several of these, serves to reflect the authenticity of the film as it simulates history. Second, there is criticism of the history itself, that is, the motives and values of the historical events as imposed on the Native people. In this critical role the film must not be considered the culprit or responsible party but simply the medium that assists us to reconsider the

morality of the age as it is depicted in the cinematic drama. Finally, there is the contribution of the film as it attempts to make a statement in the reassessment of these traditional values and moral practices. It is in this context that film contributes a morally based “mythological” message as a vehicle of dramatic allegory. This allegorical message is the deeper subtext of the film, and it contributes much, in my mind, to the creative and artistic merit of the film. The critical evaluation of these factors as they create (1) a faithful sense of history, (2) a means of reflection on the lessons of history, and (3) an inherent allegorical theme of moral value considerations is the intent and purpose of this cinematic archaeological analysis.

The plot of the allegorical drama depicted in *The Mission* begins with a Roman Catholic legate addressing a letter to the pope. In this way the film narrative employs a trope in which the letter represents a means to engage the allegory that follows. In dictating his letter, the legate declares, “Your holiness the little matter that brought me here to the farthest edge of your light here on earth is now settled. And the Indians are free once more to be enslaved by the Spanish and Portuguese settlers.”

Concluding that his epistle is not hitting the right note, the legate begins anew, telling a story of “the Indians existing in their natural state and the Jesuits who received martyrdom.” In these opening scenes the film has introduced us to Father Lupe Luis Altamirano, who on 8 December 1751 was appointed visitor plenipotentiary to South America. Appointed by a weak procurator general, his brother Father José Altamirano, he represents the worst type of court priest but is given absolute authority in all matters concerning the treaty. Accompanied by the Marqués de Valdeliríos, the chief boundary commissioner, Altamirano landed in Montevideo in 1752.⁷⁷ In comment, Father Berrigan refers to Altamirano as the papal legate to the missions.⁷⁸

In turning to the allegorical consideration of the film, these opening remarks engage two popular Christian themes that promote the sanctity of the church at the expense of aboriginals. First, there is the business of fallen humanity existing in a “natural state” at “the farthest edge of . . . [God’s] light here on earth.” From this perspective it may be concluded that Natives are “fallen” and “savage” and therefore in need of Christian salvation, hence the justification for missionization. The second Christian theme is that of martyrdom, wherein those who “selflessly” engage in this “great-good” work of “salvation” are martyrs when unjustly opposed and killed, either by Indians or by evil men of the state. We observe a tale of good versus evil inherent in this drama as it explores the historic struggle between church and Crown.

The theme of Christian martyrdom is begun in the opening sequence, when a priest, Father Carlos, tied to a cross, is launched into the waters of a Guairán river by a band of Indians. Wearing a crown of thorns, he floats down and over the great falls, plunging to his death in a simile of Christ on the cross. Repeatedly in his journal, Father Berrigan expresses doubt regarding this scene and the wax “doll” prop that is used to make it. In this regard critic Jean Franco, who labels the scene as nonhistorical and designed to promote a shock effect, agrees with Berrigan.⁷⁹ Addressing the two charges, let us reconsider the film’s intent with regard to historical fact. In the first case, were Jesuit priests

murdered by Natives during their acts of evangelism? In fact, the Jesuits were guilty of severe persecution of Native shamans and their traditional religions.⁸⁰ On at least one occasion the Jesuit inflexibility leads to the death of three priests. Father Roque González, superior of the reductions, Padre Alonso Rodriquez, and a third priest were killed when they entered the Asunción del Iyúí region and confronted the “sorcerer cacique Nezu.”⁸¹ As a primary figure in the early days of the mission territory, González’s death at the hands of the Natives is a significant historical fact. While the film’s depiction of the Native murder of “Father Carlos” is given to a greatly dramatic scene, it resonates historically with the murder of Father González and his companions in 1628. As for the shock effect, this martyrdom at the hands of the Natives affirms the limits of “God’s light on earth” and the “savage” nature of the “natural man” in need of salvation. In this metaphor of crucifixion featuring Father Carlos, audiences are reminded of the Christian dogma that Christ died on the cross for the sins of the “fallen,” who are to be redeemed via missionization. In allegory *The Mission* contains, therefore, a parable that humanity is fallen and in need of redemption, which is precisely the motive of the Jesuit evangelism.

Given the spectacular nature of this scene of the martyred priest, there follows a classic hero’s adventure motif, as characterized in traditional mythology. In this case the film is simply taking advantage of the magnificent Guairá Falls and the historic martyrdom of Father González as a means of creating mythic drama. Father Gabriel (Jeremy Irons), in a simile of the archangel of salvation, is shown heroically climbing the great falls, thereby entering into the mythic zone where the “natural man” (Natives) lives in blissful ignorance of God’s grace and knowledge of good and evil, knowledge that is central to salvation. In detailing the antecedents of the film, Father Gabriel would appear to be a composite of several historic priests. Foremost among these is Father Roque González, a creole who spoke Guaraní and understood the Indian temperament. González introduced hymns, processions, music, catechisms in rhyming verses, fiestas, and other features into mission life.⁸² Reflecting the cinematic Altamirano’s confidence in the film’s Father Gabriel, the historic Father González was said to have been a natural missionary. Like Father Gabriel in the film, a Padre Nicolás Durán set out in 1626 from the reduction of Santa María, not far from the Iguazú Falls. Continuing another hundred miles up the Paraná, he reached the Guairá Falls, and at the summit he was escorted to the Native Ciudad Real.⁸³ This historic feat gives credence to the scene in which Father Gabriel climbs the great falls. Later, in the context of attending the papal legate, Father Gabriel would appear to be based on Padre Nusdorffer, who on Altamirano’s arrival reported on the seven towns and sought to find ways of gaining the Indians’ acceptance of the 1751 treaty.⁸⁴ During the massacre scenes, Gabriel (Irons) appears to reflect the historic Padre Tadeo Enis, who in 1754 recorded in his diary that “he explicitly refused to accompany the Indians except as chaplain and physician to the wounded.”⁸⁵ As noted before, the film’s martyred Father Carlos would also appear to have an antecedent in Father González, but the character appears to have been given the name Carlos in honor of one of the mission procurators who journeyed to Madrid in October 1751 to consult the procurator general, Father José Altamirano.⁸⁶ In the deeper meaning of the

scene where Father Gabriel heroically ascends the Guairá Falls, the filmmakers create an arresting mythic footprint, which sets the stage for martyrdom and epiphany in the parable that follows.

Accompanying Father Gabriel, the hero, through this mythic portal of spectacular natural wonder, the falls, is the corresponding musical motif. A variant of the *Ave Maria*, this song, a chant to the “Mother of God,” is a holy lityan in Catholic Christianity. The “holy” music *Ave Maria* sets the spiritual mood throughout the film, thereby suggesting that the film is a work of God in its moral enlightenment. Sitting on a stone at streamside amid the “Godless” and “forbidding” wilderness, Father Gabriel plays *Ave Maria* on his recorder. As the Natives cautiously approach in wonderment, a disgusted shaman creeps forward, grabs the recorder from the priest, and breaks it over his knee. The shaman thus functions as a symbolic heathen who refuses and rejects this “holy” music that implied God’s word and the doctrine of salvation.⁸⁷ Insofar as the shamans were reported as the antagonists of the priests by the Jesuit chroniclers, the film is faithful on this point.

Turning to a deeper meditation, this scene, as represented by the offending shaman, acts to exalt Christianity and serves as a negative stereotype. In breaching the unoffending recorder solo, the shaman appears as an ogre, and given his status as leader of the Native religious life, the scene serves, albeit unwittingly, to denigrate the traditional Native religion.⁸⁸ Following this negative imaging of Native religion, the broken recorder floats on the water, where a more innocent “natural” collects it and returns it to the priest, imploring him to play the “holy” music. At this point, in a cinematic crosscut, the legate interrupts the epistle, declaring that, “With an orchestra the Jesuits could have subdued the whole continent. And so it was that the Indians of the Guaraní were brought to account to the everlasting mercy of God and to the short lived mercy of man.”

While the image of this “merciful” music is clearly associated with the Christian salvation doctrine, we may also acknowledge the Native respect for the life breath. As in the traditions of the Sacred Pipe, the flute likewise reflects the breath of life, and, as such, the image can be viewed as the Native embracing life’s rhythms rather than a needless redemption. Native traditions are, nevertheless, not the theme of this parable. The triumphs of the priest are evident as he subsequently plies his “holy” music for the innocent “naturals” celebrating the “mercies of God.” Commenting on the cinematic Gabriel’s use of the recorder to attract the Natives, John McNerny suggests that this music creates a cross-cultural dialogue that eventually transforms the Indians.⁸⁹ While this comment is a bit simplistic, Franco has somewhat more accurately stated the matter, declaring that the Jesuit mythology soars with their use of music to attract and convert the Natives.⁹⁰ In any case, music did play a significant role in Jesuit evangelism among the Guaraní. Mirroring the comment by Altamirano (McAnally) in the film, one Jesuit wrote, “Give me an orchestra and I shall conquer at once all the Indians for Christ.”⁹¹ Chateaubriand in New France wrote on the effects of the music: “The Indians descended from their hills to the river banks in order the better to hear the enchanting notes, while many cast themselves into the water and swam after the boats. Bows and arrows fell unheeded from the hands

of the savages and their souls received the first impression of a higher kind of existence and of the primitive delights of humanity."⁹² *The Mission* is, accordingly, accurate in this depiction of Father Gabriel's recorder solo.

In the film the recorder solo is a reverie that is abruptly and somewhat ironically broken when the trap of a mercenary and slave trader, Captain Rodrigo Mendoza (Robert De Niro), is triggered, netting many Natives. Captain Mendoza is, subsequently, shown marching his captives into Asunción and selling them to the Spanish encomendero Don Cabeza for a tidy profit. Referencing this "spectacular shot," Father Berrigan declares it "terrifies me—it is too close to the original."⁹³ As we have seen in the preceding historical sketch, this scene is well founded and based on a factual history. Juxtaposed with the recorder solo and Jesuit evangelism, this slave sequence serves to engage the viewers in the oppositional values held by the church and the state. As a result, a goateed devil is revealed in the "Garden Paradise" as the foe of Christian salvation. In this sequence Mendoza must reflect the Paulistas or mameluccos in a compressed image of historical reality. Here the film takes license with the historical conflict by placing Mendoza in Asunción and by depicting him dealing with Don Cabeza, the Spanish encomendero. The slavers were largely from São Paulo, which was under Portuguese rule and where slavery was a legal practice.

The central tenet is the salvation doctrine as based on the literal precept that all humanity is fallen and must be redeemed. The film presents this precept of the fallen in two scenarios. First, in the legate's epistle to the Pope, Altamirano declares the problematic matter, which is delivered to the audience in a reflective voice-over:

This seeking to create a paradise on earth, how easily it offends. Your Holiness is offended because it may distract from that Paradise which is to come hereafter. Their Majesties of Spain and Portugal are offended because a paradise of the poor is seldom pleasing to those who rule over them. And the settlers here are offended for the same reason. So it was this burden I carried to South America, to satisfy the Portuguese wish to enlarge their empire, to satisfy the Spanish desire that this would do them no harm, to satisfy your Holiness that these Monarchs of Spain and Portugal would threaten no more the power of the Church and ensure for you all that the Jesuits here could no longer deny you these satisfactions.

In the sequences involving the papal legate's address or narration, Father Altamirano is given to something of a moral conscience. Father Berrigan suggested that the Treaty of 1750 "trapped the Guaraní mission" and "the Papal delegate Altamirano."⁹⁴ But the historic Altamirano was never sympathetic or even supportive of the Guaraní and the Jesuit priests. As I noted in the historical sketch, he resisted the plight of both the Indians and the priests, in fact punishing them.

In the second reminder of the Fall precept we observe Altamirano in a canoe above the falls as he descends on the mission of San Carlos, which has

recently been created out of the forest by the Jesuits in association with the Guaraní. In this scene a great tree groans and breaks, crashing into the river as the legate and his company pass. "The Garden of Eden?" retorts Altamirano, and in response Father Gabriel wryly answers, "A trifle overgrown." The image is one where humankind, in a fallen state, is outside the "Garden" as a sinful castoff. This scene audiovisually invokes a cinematic simile of the Fall dogma. In the deeper context of these Conquest issues, the viewer is invited to reflect on the concomitant Christian salvation doctrine and its problematic application to the Americas.

Associated with this salvation theme are several scenes emphasizing the church in its conversion efforts to do "the good" that is "God's will." Following Father Gabriel's epic ascent of the falls and his wooing *Ave Maria* recorder solos, he encounters the evil mercenary and slave trader Captain Mendoza. During their tension-filled exchange Father Gabriel informs Captain Mendoza that "We [the Jesuits] are building a mission here. We're going to make Christians of these people." Mendoza replies, "If you have the time." Further informing the mercenary, Father Gabriel declares, "The mission is to be called San Carlos," after the priest murdered by the Indians. We are subsequently introduced to a scene of the new mission, suggesting the image of building civilization in the wilderness, including the hoisting of a crucifix atop the humble chapel. Of course it is not the province of the film to question the moral merit of such missionization activities, but the scene does invite the informed viewer to reflect on the "good" that is the Christian metanarrative.⁹⁵ This kind of spiritual philanthropy is well answered in the words of Henry David Thoreau, who thoughtfully declared, "If I knew for a certainty that a man was coming to my house with the conscious design of doing me good, I should run for my life . . . for fear that I should get some of his good done to me."⁹⁶ Good, thus, is a relative value, and the salvation doctrine is but one tradition's notion of good. It cannot be an absolute and universal good unless it be freely agreed on by all humanity, and such is by no means a worldwide norm or an evident tradition among aboriginal Americans prior to the Conquest. In consequence, the Jesuits and the church cannot possibly be attending "God's will" but are simply perpetuating their desires in "harvesting souls" for their God.⁹⁷

The film cannot be faulted for this presentation, which is consistent with the historic theme of Jesuit evangelism. It, however, might in a more enlightened sense invite viewers to entertain Thoreau's question of the "good" inherent in the Christian metanarrative. Although such a meditation might demand a less-ethnocentric identification with the Jesuit priests, it would necessarily invoke a more subtle series of signals designed to consider the Natives' civilization, their intrinsic worth and values, free of Western intervention. At this point within the confines of the film narrative, however, I do not think that it can be condemned for sympathetically following the Jesuit evangelical orientation.

Turning to the motives of the Crown or state, we can acknowledge from the foregoing historical sketch that the Crown created a metanarrative grounded in commerce and free trade. In this context a racial dogma derived from Aristotle's doctrine of natural slavery supplied the Crown with its right to

exact labor and tribute from the Natives in service of the state and its vassals. While the good of Christian precepts may be viewed as less problematic, this oppressive doctrine of involuntary servitude is in no way disguised in its evil bearing. Dramatically the film conveys this evil oppositional force, that is the state, against the Jesuits in their efforts to do “good.” While several scenes illustrate this point, three will sustain the argument put forth here. First, there is Captain Mendoza’s taking Indian slaves above the falls in the face of Jesuit opposition. As Mendoza delivers his slaves to the Spanish *encomendero*, the two men delight in their anticipated profits. Second, during the cardinal’s tribunal judgment, the Spanish *encomendero* hotly declares that slavery is a misunderstood institution and that the missions are the work of the Devil. In the third instance, during a visit to the mission of San Miguel, the Spanish *encomendero* remarks that he sees no difference between the mission and his own plantation or *encomienda*. Answered that the difference is the sharing of communal wealth, he raves in response while championing the capitalist mantra that trade is the law of supply and demand—a law in which Indians and the mission have no place. Clearly the *encomenderos*, as vassals of the Crown, become the evil combatants in the allegorical drama.

In keeping with the spirit of the times and historical precedent, the Natives as aboriginal sovereigns received little attention from the filmmakers. As grounded in the historical precedent, the Natives and their lands are objects coveted by both combatants in the Conquest tradition. Faithfully rendering this condition, the film gives little voice to aboriginal sovereignty. The Natives are caught between fates: on the one hand, there is the church, with its desire to “harvest souls” in securing “God’s will” through the salvation dogma. On the other hand, there is the superior force of the Crown and its military power. Natives are thus shown complying with these demands in the context of invoking the Judeo-Christian moral parable of a brother’s keeper that the film extols in the allegorical treatment of the Conquest.

Following the sequences of capture and enslavement at the hands of Captain Mendoza, the film begins to foreshadow its central messages of “brother care” and “neighbor love” in relation to the Natives. As Rodrigo Mendoza returns to Asunción, the film introduces the audience to his love interest, the lady Carlotta, and his beloved brother, Felipé, thereby creating an intriguing love triangle. While Rodrigo has been about his business ventures as a mercenary and slave trader, his younger brother has developed a love affair with Carlotta. As the clandestine lovers, Carlotta and Felipé, attempt to dissuade Rodrigo in his pursuit of Carlotta, it is clear that a bond of deep affection exists between the brothers. When Carlotta privately informs Rodrigo that she loves Felipé and not him, he leaves in hurtful doubt. As the carnival, Feast of the Ascension, begins, Rodrigo subsequently discovers the lovers clandestinely embraced, and he stalks away filled with jealous rage. Unbalanced and seeking only to punish someone for his hurt, Rodrigo picks a fight with an innocent stranger. At this point Felipé, who ran after his brother, intercedes, declaring that the quarrel is between the brothers. In his rage the seasoned mercenary and combatant Rodrigo slays his more gentle and innocent brother. In this sequence celebrating “the Ascension” the film

presents an allegorical parable reflecting the Cain and Abel biblical story. It is cast in the symbolism of the “ascension of the Virgin,” that is, the Christian mother of God motif championing the aforementioned salvation doctrine. These motifs have a lucid allegorical message for the viewers of *The Mission* as they contemplate the Conquest of the Americas.

Later we see Rodrigo wasting away in prison. He has slain his brother, becoming the fallen man for whom salvation is essential. In his stupor he is offered redemption by the protagonist, Father Gabriel. The priest entices Rodrigo to undergo a penance for the sin of killing his brother. In assessing this moment in the film, Berrigan repeatedly calls it the “Great pivotal scene” on which “all depends” and likens it to the friendship of Ignatius and Francis Xavier in the founding of the Jesuit Order: “Ignatius saw his volatile friend not as another ‘soul to be won,’ but as a brother whose talents complemented his own, ‘the very half of his soul.’ Ignatius saw him as someone of promise and achievement, someone who would be indispensable to his enterprise.”⁹⁸

Minding this comment, it is clear that Berrigan advised the actors, Jeremy Irons and Robert De Niro, to emulate these founding fathers of the Jesuit Order when playing this “great pivotal scene.” But why is Berrigan so insistent that everything depends on this scene? In the first case, Berrigan, a Jesuit himself, apparently sought to instill a mythic sense of the sect’s origins, and for that purpose these conditions are replicated at key moments, again and again, within the life of the Order. As a result, the redemptive encounter of Father Gabriel and Captain Mendoza is a transforming moment akin to the original motivation empowering the first Jesuit mission among the Guaraní. In the second context there is the simile of redemption, whereby a slave trader in fratricide, Mendoza, comes to God’s love, symbolized in Father Gabriel, à la Xavier via Ignatius. Mendoza’s life of violence in man’s inhumanity to man is righted by Gabriel’s agape, the gospel of selfless love.

Rodrigo’s penance leads him to mission life among the Guaraní, a tribe living above the falls that he has previously preyed on as a mercenary and slave trader. The penance includes an ordeal of dragging the armaments of warfare and enslavement in a test of endurance overland and up the falls. In accompanying the priests Rodrigo struggles piteously, and some of them seek to end the ordeal; but Father Gabriel knows that it is a penance of the heart and that only Rodrigo will know when it is time to cast aside the burden. In symbolizing the means of warfare and the killing of one’s fellow man, the burden persists as Rodrigo and the priests reach the Guaraní. As they enter the Indians’ domain, Rodrigo is recognized as the mercenary, and the Natives prepare to execute him. When, however, they acknowledge that he is no longer a threat and at best a suffering lost soul, they relieve him of his burden of guilt, casting the bundle into the river.⁹⁹ In this act of forgiveness on behalf of the Natives against whom he has previously committed great wrongs, Rodrigo is free, at last, of his penance, and he weeps openly for the loss and grief that constitutes man’s inhumanity to man in the “brother care” doctrine. The Guaraní subsequently offer Rodrigo life among them. In one scene he is taken by the hand and symbolically painted in an apparent Guaraní gesture of initiation and adoption. These acts of forgiveness and communal love serve to

open Rodrigo to the path of redemption and salvation. He remains, however, unable to engage the Guaraní life when he rejects the rite of killing a boar that is essential to their survival as a people in nature. Observing the playful children and the communal love of the Guaraní, Rodrigo forgives himself, and he approaches the priests in gratitude. In the spirit of the neighbor-love doctrine Rodrigo announces his desire to become a Jesuit and offers his thanks to his priestly benefactors. Father Gabriel responds that he must thank the Guaraní and read the scriptures. We subsequently see and hear Rodrigo reading from the Apostle Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians—"When I was a child, I spoke as a child. When I was a man . . . hope, love, but the greatest of these is love"—that constitutes the agape doctrine of neighbor love.

By way of analysis, we may restate these motifs—brother care and neighbor love—and summarize the film's central message. Rodrigo's quarrel and subsequent murder of Felipé invoke a simile of the biblical Cain and Abel story. This simile is allegorically presented in the film to convey the moral of Conquest as it applies to the Spanish and Portuguese as Western powers in conquering Native America. "Am I my brother's keeper?" echoes Cain in holy parable as the viewer observes the parallel in the Conquest of the Americas. In the invasion of the Native lands Rodrigo's penance, the dragging of the weapons of war through life, serves allegorically to remind the viewer of the incalculable death and moral deficiency that accompanied the Conquest. It represents the perils of Western civilization and the dogma of "original sin." Rodrigo's redemption at the hands and hearts of the innocent Guaraní Natives serves the central Christian doctrine of salvation through love. This redemption through love is the agape doctrine or neighbor love that stands in moral judgment of the Crown and church in the Conquest.

Having observed these Christian moral precepts—brother care and neighbor love—dramatized in *The Mission*, we may turn our attention to the moral struggle that accompanies the Conquest as depicted in the film. To this extent there are the savagism speculations, as well as the doctrine of natural slavery, which together vexed the church and plagued the Spaniards in their respective struggles for justice in the Americas. As set forth earlier, the Crown and the church struggled in reaching a moral judgment by Christian precepts for their claim on and occupation of the Americas. In these debates the church acted as arbitrator in judgment over the Conquest, prescribing the moral tenets for the demise of Natives and their sovereignty, as well as for the conversion of Natives to Christianity.

The film presents a sequence devoted to the arrival in Asunción of the papal legate, Father Lupe Luis Altamirano, who has, heretofore, served to convey the narrative that is depicted onscreen. It is the legate's purpose to investigate the Jesuit activities in the region and to determine the Crown's rights regarding the mission territories. To this end Altamirano in self-reflection declares, "What a strange world I had been sent to judge." At the subsequent court convocation there appears a Guaraní child from the mission of San Carlos singing the *Ave Maria*, and afterward the legate asks, "How can this child be a savage and sing like that?"¹⁰⁰ In unabashed fury the Spanish encomendero, Don Cabeza (Charles Low), retorts, "Even a parrot can be

taught to sing. He is an animal of the forest, . . . [who] will have to be subdued by the sword and put to profitable labor." A spirited engagement ensues as the encomenderos seek to disenfranchise the Natives via the savagism dogma and the doctrine of natural slavery. The Jesuits conversely seek to exalt the Natives as naturally spiritual and to champion them against slavery. In the process the Jesuit novice Rodrigo accuses the encomendero, Don Cabeza, of lying. In fact, Don Cabeza is the man with whom Rodrigo, as Captain Mendoza, had previously conspired in dealings in the slave trade. This exchange leads to a charge of Jesuit contempt of the Crown and serves to disenfranchise the Jesuit moral authority. As such, it reflects the historic fears held by the Spanish and Portuguese Crowns concerning the Jesuit resistance to the king's order to hand over the mission territories.¹⁰¹ The exchange prepares audiences for the consideration of the savagism dogma as applied to the Natives.

In the succeeding sequence the Guaraní are likened to animals, as per the savagism dogma. The sequence begins with a scene showing the Portuguese gentleman holding a sloth that is clutching his breast and shoulder much like a human infant.¹⁰² Observing the scene, the legate comments, "Those are Guaraní?" To which Signor Hontar (Ronald Pickup) replies, "Yes your eminence." Altamirano continues, "Extraordinary." "What?" asks Signor Hontar. "It's very difficult to tell what they are thinking," resumes Altamirano, as he questions further: "Have you found this in your home town?" Signor Hontar responds, "I had exactly the same reaction when I first came here your eminence." "Pretty creature, should fetch a lot of money on the streets of Lisbon," he concludes. To which Altamirano responds, "Yes, well perhaps she doesn't want to go to the streets of Lisbon." Signor Hontar defers to the legate, "Perhaps not." This sequence serves as a cinematic simile of the colonial judgment of the Native peoples. The Guaraní sloth is a metaphor for the Guaraní Natives as savages. The Crown seeks to invoke the savagism dogma, concluding the Natives are beasts and establishing a "natural" slavery wherein the Natives are brought to the whip for profit and lawful trade as desired by the encomenderos. The Jesuits, conversely, seek to establish the humanity of the Natives for the purpose of saving their souls. Both sides, therefore, view the Natives through the precepts of instrumental value and utilitarian ethics, denying them their intrinsic worth.

Concluding the sequence, the legate and the encomenderos discuss the political differences and intrigue that exist between the Crown and the church in regard to the Conquest. The encomenderos consider the Jesuit order and its mission far too powerful in curbing the affairs of the state. Thoughtfully dismissing them, Altamirano peers over his glasses and pricks them with an afterthought as the encomenderos leave, declaring, "Gentlemen, I too was once a Jesuit." The image of the papal legate peering over his glasses when questioning the virtue of the Crown's judgment of the Guaraní appears to have been taken from a 1751 incident in Madrid. When the two Guaraní procurators traveled to that city, they encountered Father José Ignacio Altamirano, who "glanced at the visitors over the top of his glasses," declaring, "I guess somebody has to tell you and it might as well be me: you are showing up here at the least opportune moment! The flood

of representations and protests makes your Province suspect of opposition against the treaty."¹⁰³ In the film this exchange establishes a significant tension for the drama that ensues.

First, however, there is the apology scene in which Rodrigo must beg forgiveness for questioning the moral piety of the Crown. This scene has two historical antecedents that are worth noting. In a letter from the Marqués of Pombal, architect of the treaty, the Portuguese position concerning the priests and the missions is detailed. The letter reads:

The position of priest of a "Doctrina" gives the fathers no right to profit from the work of the Indians and to prevent them from enjoying ownership in what they produce by their own labor and industry; it bothers my conscience that they [the priests] keep them [the Indians] in perpetual servitude because what else is it if everything the Indians grow is only for them [the priests]—nothing the Indians can own and leave to his sons. The fact that they give them the bare necessities because such is even the obligation an owner has toward his slaves—¹⁰⁴

The content of this letter with its priestly disparagement is reflected in the actions of Don Cabeza on several occasions within the film: first, in answer to the legate's inquiry concerning the Guaraní child's singing; second, during the exchange with Altamirano, when demanding an apology from the Jesuit novice Rodrigo; and finally, during the legate's visit to the San Miguel mission. The letter has the character of inverting the truth and casting the Jesuit fathers as the guilty party.

The Jesuit "insult" as manifest in the film is itself born of the historic response to this Pombal letter. Authored by Father Rodero, in response to the Marqués, he offered a rebuttal in a series of rhetorical questions: "Did the Jesuits indulge in illicit commerce? Did they obey the laws governing the teaching of Spanish? Did they respect the rules of the "Patronato Real"? Should the Guaraní be allowed to have their own militia? Why were no tithes paid to the bishops?"¹⁰⁵ In another incident the governor of Asunción left after a *mameluccos* raid with a torrent of abusive language.¹⁰⁶ These two somewhat desperate historic incidents are brought together in the film's apology sequence. In his charge against the *encomenderos*, the novice Rodrigo gives dramatic life to Father Rodero's rhetorical assertions. Don Cabeza's violent reaction is dramatically akin to the historic response of the governor of Asunción. In advising Jeremy Irons (Father Gabriel) of this sequence, Berrigan sought to depict "the realities binding a Jesuit."¹⁰⁷ In sum, the film makes excellent use of these historically desperate events when combining them for good effect in dramatizing this history.

In the interests of affairs of the Crown and church the legate must execute the foregone conclusion to terminate the missions in order to save the power of the church. In the process of appeasing Christian moral piety, he must make the termination of the missions appear fair and just, so he sets out to view the missions. Beginning with the oldest, San Miguel, Altamirano finds himself

wholly unprepared for the sacrifice that he must make. The missions are shown as productive, communal affairs celebrating the humanity of the Natives. These findings are viewed objectively by the encomenderos, who see the missions as competition with their own plantations. Troubled by his conscience, Altamirano seeks to prevail on the encomenderos to ensure the continuation and protection of the missions but his attempts fall on deaf ears, and it becomes a foregone conclusion that he will terminate the missions, as he sits for hours amid a chapel filled with burning candles.¹⁰⁸ It is at this point that Father Gabriel prevails on him to visit the mission of San Carlos, above the falls.

Although the film has Altamirano receive a letter dooming the missions while he is visiting San Miguel, there was a historic letter from Procurator General Francis Retz in January 1751. Addressed to the provincial of Paraguay, this letter summoned the mission priests to a meeting at San Miguel in April 1751. The film is acting on this historic incident to convey a dramatic sequence that depicts the character of the mission civilizations. "San Miguel" was "a place inhabited by 7,000 Indians and famous for its magnificent church and fine row of buildings."¹⁰⁹

In this sequence there is an exchange with a Native, ordained as a priest and played by a Cambodian actor. While the dialogue is effective in conveying the historic egalitarian character of the missions, much has been made of the errancy of this character. Critics suggest two errors in this sequence: first, the depiction of the missions headed by a Guaraní Indian, when "the indigenous were excluded from the Jesuit Order." Second, this figure was played by a Cambodian actor instead of a Native.¹¹⁰ In response, first, the critic is simply wrong concerning the role of Guaraní Natives among the Jesuit order. Several creoles (mixed-blood Indians) became Jesuit priests, and some played major roles in the Jesuit Republic. While I have suggested that the historic life of Father Roque González, a Guaraní creole,¹¹¹ is used to formulate the character of Father Gabriel in the film, he would also serve as the factual head of the missions. In addition, a Father Ruiz Montoya, who also served as father superior to the missions, was a Peruvian creole.¹¹² In fact the founder of the "Jesuit Republic," Father Tores, himself, was a "criollo."¹¹³ In the second point, the matter of casting a Cambodian actor in this role of a Native is a common problem suffered by Native Americans in their cinematic depiction. Later, in the destruction sequence of San Miguel, this priest, at gunpoint, is made to take off his cassock while suckling babes are placed on the ground in the rain where soldiers bash out their brains. Over the course of the Jesuit Republic many priests were taken captive along with their charges; among them Father Montoya suffered such an ordeal. Also suckling babes were, in fact, murdered during the destruction of San Miguel.¹¹⁴ As a result, these scenes appear historically accurate, although necessarily desperate.

Turning to Altamirano's first visit to the mission of San Carlos, the historical precedents are somewhat lacking; however, there are past foundations for this town. In fact, with the exception of San Borja, the historic Altamirano never visited any of the seven towns subject to Portuguese dispossession.¹¹⁵ The dramatic visit is necessary to drive the conquest theme and brother-keeper allegory. It does, however, foreshadow events in the historic

destruction of the missions. For instance, in August 1752 a survey team set out to establish a boundary as far as the river Ibicuí. Reaching Santa Tecla, an estancia belonging to San Miguel, the survey team was confronted by sixty-eight Guaraní who refused to let them pass. In a later meeting of 27 February 1753 the Indians agreed to let the Spaniards pass but refused the Portuguese such passage.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, in the final campaign two imperial armies meet at Santa Tecla, the last outpost conquered.¹¹⁷ As a result of these factual events, Santa Tecla appears to have supplied the inspiration for the fictive San Carlos depicted in the film.

In Altamirano's journey to San Carlos the film depicts an arrival from upstream, thereby circumambulating Iguazú Falls. Protecting the missions, these great falls and several others yielded access to them only from the west.¹¹⁸ Although we have previously noted that Father Gabriel scales the great falls, the depiction of Altamirano's visit appears at once out of character in its access to San Carlos. Given, however, that the missions above the falls were accessible by an arduous journey overland and canoe downstream, then the scene makes sense. In 1631 Father Montoya, escaping the *mamelucos*, led a flotilla of canoes above the Guairá Falls on the Paraná.¹¹⁹ This antecedent to Altamirano's flotilla in the film supplies a historical precedent for the scene with its journey to San Carlos.¹²⁰ Arranging a reception of singing Native women and children, lining a log bridge above the river, the film creates a joyous welcome for the papal legate.¹²¹ As such, the scene is designed to create a dramatic irony when Altamirano's true purpose is later revealed in conference with the *caciques* and priests of San Carlos.

As the legate enters the mission of San Carlos, the scene is reminiscent of the Passion and its Palm Sunday sequence, when "Jesus" is said to have ridden a donkey into the city on palm strewn streets. The cinematic simile of the Passion begins in *The Mission* with Altamirano entering San Carlos to the chant of the *Ave Maria* and a matting of palm fronds on the ground before him. The Passion allegory foreshadows the concluding massacre sequence that simulates the crucifixion motif. Before, however, addressing the full scope of the Passion allegory, let us focus on its initial depiction. As Altamirano looks on his charges at San Carlos, he reflects on his role in the Conquest allegory: "Though I knew that everywhere in Europe, states were tearing at the authority of the Church and though I knew the Church must show its authority over the Jesuits here, I still could not help wondering whether these Indians would not have preferred that the sea and the wind had not brought any of us to them."

The effect of this reflection on the appropriateness of the church in missionization of the aboriginal Americans is clearly emphasized in a close-up shot focused on the eyes and face of a young Native child innocently viewing the legate's entrance. This close-up serves powerfully to raise doubt in the authority prescribed by the Church in legitimating the Conquest on the grounds of Christian goodwill and conversion.

In a further simile to the question of Native sovereignty, both secular and spiritual, Altamirano is subsequently seen in discussion with tribal leaders. He informs the Natives that they must leave the mission, but they respond that the

mission is their home and that they do not wish to leave it. Playing his ecclesial trump card, Altamirano answers with the command that they must submit to the “will of God.” At this invocation the Natives reasonably ask, “How does he know God’s will?” Further interpolating, Father Gabriel translates: “He [the chief] doesn’t think that you speak for God; he thinks you speak for the Portuguese.” Altamirano fumes that he speaks for the church, which is “God’s instrument on earth.” At this tautology, the Guaraní chief declares that he, too, is a king and that he should never have trusted them. There is something of a historical antecedent to this scene when a cacique from San Miguel sent a “chasqui” to warn the boundary commissar not to come near their town.¹²² Furthermore, during these encounters the Indians developed a special hatred for Altamirano, fearing that he was a Portuguese agent.¹²³ Suggesting that the Guaraní return to the forest, Altamirano’s concern shifts to the Jesuit priests, and he admonishes them that they must not fight, lest they be excommunicated. In the case of this warning, the film is quite charitable given that the real Altamirano, shortly after his arrival in Montevideo in 1752, ordered “a battery of excommunications” of his Jesuit brethren. As a result, the priests in the seven towns became torn in their loyalties between Altamirano and the Indians.¹²⁴ This sequence serves to challenge the church and its tautological claim on the “will of God” with the skeptic’s reasoned question, “How do you know the will of God?” In the chief’s assertion of his own authority, the film reinforces the earlier reflection of the legate when he meditates on these Natives’ wish to have never had contact with the Europeans and their institutions, thereby suggesting a questioning of his faith under the guise of the salvation doctrine.

Despite this skeptical reflection on the legitimacy of the Conquest, *The Mission* is somewhat lacking in its presentation of pre-Columbian Native civilization. When Altamirano offers that the Guaraní go back into the forest, the implication is that the Natives live as savages without human habitation. This depiction is entirely erroneous given that the Natives had central dwellings or villages from which they conducted their gathering and hunting economy over an extended territorial range. Although limited in impact on the forest, the villages may be viewed as urban centers of a sort, just as the mission of San Carlos is presented in the film. In the dialogue attending this matter, the children are given to express that “they do not wish to go back into the forest because the Devil lives there.” This unhealthy reaction is clearly a result of the teachings of the Jesuits, and it denigrates both the Native way of life and the jungle in which the Native villages are situated. It thus compounds a misunderstanding of Native life and the Natives’ spiritual, cultural, and civil practices.¹²⁵ *The Mission* is here playing to the Christian ideological notion that because they have been brought to the “light” of “rational belief,” the Natives’ “return to the forest” would constitute a return to savagery, the Devil, and “fallen man.” Conceptually this conclusion is intrinsically biased and self-validating of the savagism dogma that erroneously denies Native civilization and religion. In presenting this sequence, the film is not necessarily at fault because it is precisely the ideological orientation of both the church and the Crown, giving them a pseudoclaim on the Americas that fueled the Conquest.

There is, however, another factor in these scenes that poses problems for the film. David Johnson references this sequence, noting that it “depicts the inculcation of a debased language for the natives.”¹²⁶ In manifesting this charge, there is the exchange between Altamirano and the Guaraní language while privileging the autonomous English. The problems of this speech exchange are most noticeable when, in the scene, masked English is passed off as Guaraní.¹²⁷

The subsequent war sequence brutally portrays the massacre of the Natives living on their doomed missions. As a factor of intrigue, Rodrigo and his Jesuit brothers seek to fight as warriors opposing the conquest of their mission, while Father Gabriel invokes the agape doctrine of selfless love that is preached—“God is love”—in some of the synoptic Gospels. Gabriel implores Rodrigo that he is a priest and that he must help them, the Indians, as a priest: “If you die with blood on your hands, you betray everything you believe in.” In this sequence the filmmakers were confronted with a complex set of historical precedents. Jesuit priests had long defended the Indians from the *mameluccos*, or Paulistas, in their slave raids. In doing so, these men of the cloth had raised and trained a Guaraní army. Assuming the role of father superior, Diego Alfaro, in 1641, expanded the organization of an Indian military force, raising four thousand soldiers to face the Paulistas.¹²⁸ On this basis alone there is precedent for Rodrigo and his brethren to engage the invaders in combat. In fact, the character appears to have antecedents in two historical Jesuit brothers. First, in 1641 Brother Domingo de Torres commanded an army of four thousand Indians, only three hundred of whom had firearms, when repelling an assault of four hundred *mameluccos* and their twenty-seven hundred Tupi Indian allies. In the second case Brother Claude Ruyer, a Fleming native, drew up a plan of defense and took command of the reduction fleet, canoes, to drive back a flotilla of *mameluccos*.¹²⁹ In commanding the mission defenses, Rodrigo appears to have qualities drawn from both of these historic Jesuits, particularly Ruyer. Although the sequence within the film results in the defeat and destruction of the Indian defense, in 1641 the Guaraní led by Jesuit brothers succeeded in driving away the *mameluccos*. These events appear to match the film scenes depicting the battle.

Conversely when engaging the agape doctrine, for dramatic effect, the scene serves to affirm the Christian faith tautology of afterlife and judgment in a moral universe that is central to the salvation doctrine. Ironically, the invading armies are shown receiving the blessings of priests as they go forth with the Christian civilization mantra “God is on our side,” which as we may note was likewise evident in Nazi Germany during World War II and the Holocaust.¹³⁰ It seems that the moral certainty of “God’s will” is anything but absolute and universal in such hideous examples.

In managing their defense, the Jesuit and Native opposition ignore the most venerable moment of the attacking armies when they are ascending the great falls. Northwest of Iguazú Falls, a forceful natural barrier protected the missions there. “Our missionaries,” wrote Padre Sepp, “are of the opinion that God made these rapids for the benefit of the poor Indians.”¹³¹ In fact the Guaraní, when referencing these great falls, told a mythic narrative that

implied “no living thing could survive near these cataracts.”¹³² Clearly there is no historic example of a military ascent of these falls, such as that depicted in the film. The sequence is a dramatic device designed to heighten the impending sense and scope of conquest and destruction. The massacre is nonetheless inevitable, though the foregoing observation is not easily overlooked because it suggests that Natives were poor warriors strategically and tactically inept at opposing an enemy. Although Jesuit brothers had earlier led Natives in their resistance to the *mameluccos*, in the final historic assault on San Miguel and its estancia, Santa Tecla, there were no such leaders. In fact, as noted earlier, a disorganized band of warriors led by Sepé was slaughtered in less than an hour and a quarter. As a result, the futility of Indian resistance is aptly illustrated in the film. Conversely, in the subsequent massacre of Father Gabriel while leading his praying charges of women, children, and old men, there is a sober effect designed to accord sympathy with the *agape* doctrine and this priest in his missionization efforts. Berrigan, commenting on this sequence with Father Gabriel at prayer in the mission church, concluded that it seemed “to reduce Gabriel and his followers to passive victims.” In Berrigan’s judgment, Gabriel thus became a “hero and martyr.”¹³³ In observing viewing audiences, I have noticed that there is a strong tendency to favorably regard and respect Father Gabriel in his martyrdom, which is directly attributable to this massacre sequence and his *agape* resistance.

While meeting with the respective Spanish and Portuguese *encomenderos*, Altamirano, when faced with the massacre, remarks, “And you have the effrontery to tell me that this slaughter was necessary.” “Yes, in truth, yes for a legitimate purpose which you sanctioned,” replies the Spanish *encomendero*, Don Cabeza, while the Portuguese gentleman, Signor Hontar, answers, “You had no alternative, your eminence. We work in the world, the world is thus.” “No Signor Hontar,” concludes the legate, “thus have we made the world. Thus have I made it.” Although viewers may draw back and question the assault and violent mayhem of the mission slaughter, it is a fitting example in simulating the endlessly repeated massacres of Native American aboriginals at the hands of Christians and civilized Europeans. In this role the massacre of the San Carlos mission acts to convey allegorically the Conquest of the Americas in its terminal course of imperialism.

Although I have sustained the thesis of this essay in the foregoing review, my concluding analysis of the film and its contribution to understanding the Conquest remains to be illuminated. In the final sequence of *The Mission* a scene opens with a view of a naked doe-eyed young girl entering the charred mission of San Carlos. At this point critics are quick to suggest a simile with events in the Vietnam War and the Nicaraguan conflict. McInerny, for example, concludes that in the “shot of a naked little girl, still numb from witnessing the terrifying brutality of war,” she walks “towards the camera and into the river to pick up a discarded violin. The moment seems to be a deliberate echo of that famous news photo of a similar child fleeing her burning village in Vietnam.”¹³⁴ Berrigan likewise linked it to third world conflict. “The mission, it seems to me,” he wrote, “is an accurate image of Nicaragua and Afghanistan and Northern Ireland and South Africa.”¹³⁵ In fact, director

Roland Joffé, when making *The Mission*, was fresh from his dramatic exposé *The Killing Fields* (1984), which depicts the Pol Pot regime's genocide in Cambodia. Accordingly, there is good reason to suspect similes of these current events in third world oppression. Notwithstanding this conclusion, I suspect that the Christian dogmas remain inescapable. For instance, there is an implied connection to the conquest of the Americas. Here the young girl, featured in close-up when Altamirano expressed his doubts about the Indians' interest in receiving the Europeans on the shores of America, in this post-massacre scene signifies the moral failure of the church in regulating the Conquest. The nakedness of this child and of the other children suggests that they will return to nature without the benefit of salvation as postulated by the church. When she rejoins her companions at the river, she is confronted with two objects in the water. Of these, a ritual candelabra and a broken violin, she chooses the damaged violin when joining the others in the canoe. Commenting on her choice, Franco concludes that she is thus "armed with this fragment of civilization" when the children flee into the forest.¹³⁶ In my opinion, however, the girl's selection of the broken violin signifies a Native choice reflecting the musically inclined life-song over the Christian "enlightenment" represented by the candelabra. So it would appear that the film concludes with the children's return to "savagery" in a life without divine "salvation." A last irony remains when Altamirano appears in reprise, concluding his epistle to the pope: "So your Holiness, now your priests are dead and I am left alone, but in truth, it is I who am dead and they who live. For as always your Holiness, the Spirit of the dead will survive in the memory of the living."

The cinematic depiction of the Crown's brutality and the perfidy of the church advance audience awareness of the genocide that was the Conquest. The film appears to champion the martyred priests, who, despite the presumably benign brother care and egalitarian neighbor-love doctrines, are imperialists in their efforts among the Natives. In their respective "rights" of occupation and usurpation the Crown came seeking profit, labor, and wealth while the church offered judgment, justice, and salvation. These are the values of instrumentalism—slavery and "soul-lust"—and they serve utilitarian outcomes. Manifest in this morality is a denial of the intrinsic value of the Natives and their way of life. While it is easy to recognize the brutality and genocide precipitated by the Crown, the church's role is less evident, although it is no less brutal or depleting. That all humanity is fallen and requires salvation sustains a tautology of faith, which constitutes the metanarrative of Christianity and the church. These were never the intrinsic views of Native Americans, and they are not markers of a true agape—selfless neighbor love. Indeed, the salvation doctrine as agape is a contradiction of values. How, for example, is it that one can profess selfless love, unfettered with the desire to change, for the other and then set about destroying his or her values and religious institutions? Certainly the salvation doctrine of the priests was a foreign imposition that denied the intrinsic value of the Natives' own religion and their aboriginal civilization.

Concluding with two epigrams, the film masks this problematic role of

missionization among Native peoples.¹³⁷ First, it concludes with a sequence interposing the naked children's return to the forest—innocent savagery—and Altamirano's reprisal in moral conundrum. In the first of these there is a didactic message scripted on the screen: "The Indians of South America are still engaged in a struggle to defend their land and their culture. Many of the priests who, inspired by faith and love, continue to support the rights of the Indians for justice, do so with their lives."

This message, of course, reinforces the martyrdom of the priests portrayed in the film, but in so doing, it acts to justify the usurpation of Native religion that is the debilitating outcome of missionization. How can self-serving salvation be selfless love? Do the priests not seek converts? And, is this activity free of cultural imperialism in dictating cultural change among the Natives? In answering this pseudo-agape, we would do well to heed Thoreau's warning: "If you know that someone is coming to your door to do you good, then run for your life lest some of his good get done to you" (paraphrase).

In the second case of the Christian faith's imperialism reposed in *The Mission's* conclusion, there is a quotation from the Gospel according to John: "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness had not overcome it." John, chapter 1, verse 5." This concluding interpolation of the Christian gospel serves to invert the Conquest allegory that the film has so successfully conveyed. It reasserts the savagism dogma in the metaphor that the "light" or "truth"—Christianity—briefly took hold at the mission of San Carlos with the valiant Jesuit priests and that although quashed by a brutal conquest, it will shine forth again in the "darkness" that is the aboriginal "wilderness" of the Americas. Although this interpolation of the Christian metanarrative allows viewers of *The Mission* to free their moral conscience of guilt and doubt, it undermines the film's central allegory, that is, the genocide—both physically and spiritually—precipitated by the twin conquering European institutions—Crown and church—commonly rationalized as "civilized and Christianized" in the Conquest of the Americas.

NOTES

1. *The Mission*, written by Robert Bolt and directed by Roland Joffé (Los Angeles: Warner Brothers, 1986). Golden Palm winner for best picture, Cannes Film Festival, Cannes, France, 1986. John McNerny, "The Mission and Robert Bolt's Drama of Revolution," *Literature and Film Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1987): 70–77, noted, however, that critics were divided in their reviews. Citing Jack Kroll's *Newsweek* essay "Faith, Hope, and Treachery" (3 Nov. 1986), 81, McNerny identifies the critic's praise of the film as "a soaring dramatic experience." On the other hand, he also notes Bosley Crowther's *New York Times* review (31 Oct. 1986), C13, which terms it "a pretentious allegory with transparent, one-dimensional characters." In Crowther's negative assessment McNerny notes that critics have tended to blame the script. Notwithstanding this criticism, the film was well received, earning an Academy Award nomination for best picture and winning the award for cinematography.

2. By *Conquest*, I am conferring a status on the events—explorations, wars, missions, and diseases—that were collectively used by colonial Europeans to dispose

of the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas. Given that this engagement is a macroevent in world history, I have chosen to capitalize the term *Conquest*, as referenced to Native America. Although disease was a major factor in the depopulation of the Native Americans (see Alfred W. Crosby Jr., *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* [Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972]; Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986]), the deliberate manner in which Natives were enslaved, killed in war, and dispossessed of their aboriginal homelands illustrates an imperial Conquest. See, e.g., Frederick Turner, *Beyond Geography: The Western Spirit against the Wilderness* (New York: Viking, 1980); Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982); Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Conquest of Paradise: Christopher Columbus and the Columbian Legacy* (New York: Knopf, 1990), among many others; in a more polemical vein see Ward Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas, 1492 to the Present* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1997), as well as a capsule summary of the Conquest in Colin G. Calloway, *First Peoples: A Documentary Survey of American Indian History*, 2nd ed. (Boston: St. Martin's, 2004), 69–92.

3. Daniel Berrigan, S.J., *"The Mission": A Film Journal* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), 17–18.

4. *The Dario of Christopher Columbus's First Voyage to America, 1492–1493*, abstracted by Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, transcribed into English, with notes and concordances of Spanish by Oliver Dunn and James B. Kelly Jr. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), 67–69.

5. Turner, *Beyond Geography*, xi. For a further study of the moral impact of the Conquest see Todorov, *The Conquest of America*.

6. Sale, *The Conquest of Paradise*, 161 (original emphasis).

7. Las Casas, quoted in Carl Ortwin Sauer, *The Early Spanish Main* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 68, 155–56.

8. Sale, *The Conquest of Paradise*, 161.

9. Lewis Hanke, *Aristotle and the American Indians: A Study in Race Prejudice in the Modern World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959), 2.

10. Roy Harvey Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953, 1988); Richard Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment, and Demonology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952).

11. Hanke, *Aristotle and the American Indians*, 3–4.

12. *Ibid.*, 44–61.

13. Lewis Hanke, *The Spanish Struggle for Justice in the Conquest of America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1949), 26. Subsequent quotations from this source in this paragraph and the following one are cited parenthetically in the text.

14. *Ibid.*, 19.

15. *Ibid.*, 25.

16. *Ibid.*, 7–8, 25–27.

17. Frederick J. Reiter, *They Built Utopia: The Jesuit Missions in Paraguay, 1610–1768* (Potomac, MD: Scripta Humanistica, 1995), 128, indicated that the missionaries regarded themselves as the Indians' guardians, thereby implying a fiduciary relationship.

18. Ibid., 41; Philip Caraman, *The Lost Paradise: The Jesuit Republic in South America* (New York: Dorsett Press, 1975), 36.

19. Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 41.

20. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 236; and Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, v. This treaty, *Tratado de Limites*, is today missing from the archives in Sevilla because it was negotiated without the consent and participation of the Council of the Indies. Important portions of it, however, were published in the *Anais da Biblioteca Nacional de Rio de Janeiro*, vols. 52 and 53, as copied by the Brazilian historian Varnhagen.

21. Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 19.

22. Ibid., 118; and Berrigan, "The Mission," 8.

23. Luis G. Jaeger, *A Expulsão da Companhia de Jesus do Brazil em 1769* (Porto Alegre, 1960s); and G. Kratz, *El Tratado Hispano-Portugués de Limites de 1750 y sus Consecuencias* (Rome, 1954), 252, cited in Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 236–37; see also Berrigan, "The Mission," 9, who mistakenly cites this passage as clause 18 of the treaty.

24. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 22; Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 56; Berrigan, "The Mission," 7.

25. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 102, refers to the slave hunters as *mameluccos* in the vernacular, while Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 41–42, uses the Spanish *bandeirantes* or *Paulistas* in reference to São Paulo, which was the place of their origin.

26. Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 20; see also Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 33, who further notes that "it was said that tens of thousands of Indians had been taken from the encomenderos only to be subjected to a harsher servitude" (ibid., 237–38).

27. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 31, 237–38.

28. Ibid., 32, 34–35.

29. Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 26.

30. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 36, 14, 45.

31. Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 19, 60–61.

32. R. Streit and J. Dindinger, *Biblioteca Missionum* (Aachen, 1924), 2:14, cited in Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 36.

33. Berrigan, "The Mission," 16, 60.

34. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 36–37; Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 63–68, 83.

35. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 41.

36. Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 70.

37. Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 49; Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 69.

38. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 39; Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, i, 31.

39. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 37–39, generally praises the Jesuits in their persecution of the Native shamans or sorcerers; however, ample evidence of their crude repression of Native religious traditions is evident in the text.

40. Caraman accepts the view of the Guaraní as monotheists, but the examples do not sustain this conclusion; indeed, there is evidence in one example that the "one God" was probably the Sun (see ibid., 40–41, 43).

41. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 47.

42. Ibid., 21.

43. Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 23.

44. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 40, 46–7.

45. Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 23–24.

46. Ibid., 41.

47. Ibid., 42; Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 59.
48. Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 43; Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 101.
49. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 62.
50. Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 43.
51. Ibid., 44; Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 77.
52. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 78; Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 45.
53. Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 45, 47, 48.
54. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 78, 100, 101.
55. Ibid., 102, supplies a description of the Indian army.
56. Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 69.
57. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 101.
58. Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 115–18; Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 236.
59. When the terms of the treaty became known, controversy ensued almost immediately, leading to objections in both Portugal and Spain; see Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 236–37.
60. Ibid., 238–39.
61. Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 118–19, 121–22.
62. Ibid., 123, 124, 126.
63. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 243–44.
64. Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 153–54.
65. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 243–44.
66. Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 125.
67. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 245.
68. Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 153–54.
69. Ibid., 163; Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 246.
70. Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 165.
71. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 246.
72. Ibid., 247.
73. Ibid., 248; Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 192.
74. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 249.
75. Ibid., 250–53.
76. A notable filmmaker, Roland Joffé's directing credits include *The Killing Fields* (1984), *City of Joy* (1992), *The Scarlet Letter* (1995), *Goodbye Lover* (1998), and *Vatel* (2000). Robert Bolt's impressive body of work includes a series of award-winning screenplays and epic films, including *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), *Doctor Zhivago* (1965), *A Man for All Seasons* (1966), *Ryan's Daughter* (1970), *Lady Caroline Lamb* (1972), and *Bounty* (1984), as well as the plays *Viva! Viva! Regina* and *State of Revolution*.
77. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 243–44.
78. Daniel Berrigan, "The Mission Diary," *American Film* 12, no. 2 (1986): 20–26, 65–66 (esp. 24); in subsequent references I will use the title *legate* when referring to the Altamirano character, played by the Irish actor Ray McAnally in the film.
79. Berrigan, "The Mission," 2, 65; Jean Franco, "High Tech Primitivism: The Representation of Tribal Societies in Feature Films," in *Mediating Two Worlds: Cinematic Encounters in the Americas*, ed. Ana M. Lopez, 81–94 (London: BFI, 1993).
80. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 37–40, 43, provides several examples of this repression of Native shamans and the traditional Guaraní religion.
81. Ibid., 49.

82. Ibid., 46–47.

83. Ibid., 57.

84. Compare Padre Nusdorffer's actions reported in Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 244, with those of Father Gabriel in the film.

85. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 255.

86. Ibid.

87. Repeatedly in the encounters between Christian priests and Natives, shamanic figures are denigrated in the Christian writings for rejecting the Christian doctrines. Consequently, shamans and Native religious devotees are associated with the Devil and depicted as his evil henchmen. This pattern, for example, is widely evident in *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, 73 vols. (Cleveland: Burrows Bros., 1896–1901).

88. As noted earlier, the Jesuit chroniclers often disparaged and denigrated the Natives' shamanism. See Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 37–40, 43, although Caraman is oblivious of this ethnocentrism.

89. John McInerny, "The Mission," 71 (see note 1).

90. Franco, "High-Tech Primitivism," 83.

91. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 212–13.

92. Chateaubriand, *Spirit of Christianity*, quoted in Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 213.

93. Berrigan, "The Mission," 35; also "terrifyingly original" in Berrigan, "The Mission Diary," 24.

94. Berrigan, "The Mission," 8.

95. In this notion I refer to the universal, absolute-truth claim that pervades Christian doctrine. In the context of discourse analysis the notion of a "metanarrative" is derived from postmodern philosophy. See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Post Modern Explained* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992); and Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

96. Henry David Thoreau, *The Portable Thoreau*, ed. Carl Bode (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 328.

97. In their evangelism the Jesuits refer to it as a *Conquista espiritual*, and among other such expressions, there are "souls for Christ," "salvation of souls," and a "garden of Christianity," which reinforce the notion of a "harvest of souls." See Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, ii, 31, 49, 83; Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 39, 212–13; see also Carole Blackburn, *Harvest of Souls: The Jesuit Missions and Colonialism in North America 1632–1650* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 2000).

98. Berrigan, "The Mission Diary," 25; Berrigan, "The Mission," 74–76.

99. Berrigan, "The Mission," 105, likens this "burden of guilt" to "original sin."

100. Berrigan, "The Mission Diary," 26, repeatedly refers to this image as a "sumptuous scene"; see also Berrigan, "The Mission," 79.

101. Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 123.

102. Elements of this scene with the sloth appear to have been inspired by events occurring during the filming, when the wife of the Dutch ambassador appeared on the set carrying a sloth; see Berrigan, "The Mission," 60–61. It is perhaps this same sloth that appears in the film.

103. Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 121.

104. Ibid., 98; Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 253–54, notes that “since 1750, the Marqués de Pombal, a strong supporter if not the architect of the treaty, had been appointed chief minister of Portugal.”

105. Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 99.

106. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 62.

107. Berrigan, “*The Mission*,” 85–86.

108. Ibid., 132, describes this as “a most enchanting scene” in depicting everyone in prayer at the great mission.

109. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 250; Berrigan, “*The Mission*,” 151, mistakenly concludes that “the so-called Great Mission of the film” was modeled on the San Ignacio mission.

110. Franco, “High-Tech Primitivism,” 85; Berrigan, “*The Mission*,” 69.

111. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 46–47.

112. Ibid., 40.

113. Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 23.

114. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 58.

115. Ibid., 245.

116. Ibid., 246; Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 176.

117. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 247–48; Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 176.

118. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 76–77.

119. Ibid., 65.

120. Berrigan, “*The Mission*,” 103, described the filming of this scene with “Indian dugouts” in “escort of the papal legate.”

121. Ibid., 121–22.

122. Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 153.

123. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 245.

124. Ibid., 246.

125. For conceptual clarity on the matter see my “The Wild and the Tame: Understanding Wilderness and Agriculture in Native America,” in *Environmental Ethics: Discourses and Cultural Traditions—A Festschrift to Arne Naess*, ed. Rana P. B. Singh (Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi: National Geographic Society of India, 1993), 215–29.

126. David E. Johnson, “The Place of the Translator in the Discourses of Conquest: Hernán Cortés’s *Cartas de relación* and Roland Joffe’s *The Mission*,” in *Amerindian Images and the Legacy of Columbus*, ed. René Jara and Nicholas Spadaccini, 401–24 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 403.

127. Ibid., 413, 417.

128. Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 44.

129. Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 78–79; Reiter, *They Built Utopia*, 45.

130. Berrigan, “*The Mission*,” 78–79, likewise notes the irony of these actions, but he fails to acknowledge the perfidy of the church’s role. As a paratrooper in the 101st Airborne during World War II, my father, Hansford C. Vest, took charge of a Nazi belt as a souvenir. When I was a child, I read the inscription on the buckle—“Gott mit uns” (God with us)—which challenged then and challenges now my moral imagination.

131. Quoted in Caraman, *The Lost Paradise*, 77.

132. Ibid., 65–66.

133. Berrigan, “*The Mission Diary*,” 26; Berrigan, “*The Mission*,” 123–24.

134. McNerny, “*The Mission*,” 72 (see note 1).

135. Berrigan, "*The Mission*," 12.

136. Franco, "High-Tech Primitivism," 85. Johnson, "The Place of the Translator," concludes that the scene "suggests Guaraní perseverance" (418–19). Paula Mota Santos, "Good Indians and Bad Indians: The European Perspective of Native Americans as Depicted in 'The Mission' and 'Black Robe,'" in *Native American Women in Literature and Culture*, ed. Susan Castillo and Victor M. P. Da Rosa (Porto: Fernando Pessoa University Press, 1997), sees it as a "retreat into the Amazonian forest," where they "appear in the greenery as if they had no homes but lived like animals" (189–90).

137. For a criticism of the Christian mission, readers may productively turn to Michael Martin, *The Case against Christianity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

