JOHN RYLE

MIRACLES OF THE PEOPLE: ATTITUDES TO CATHOLICISM IN AN AFRO-BRAZILIAN RELIGIOUS CENTRE IN SALVADOR DA BAHIA

Quem é ateu e viu milagres como eu
Sabe que os deuses sem Deus
Não cessam de brotar
Nem cansam de esperar e o coração
Que é soberano e que é senhor
Não cabe na escravidão,
Não cabe no seu não
Não cabe em si de tanto sim
E pura dança / E sexo / E glória
E paira para além da história
Ojuabá ia / Lá e via
. . .
Quem descobriu o Brasil / Foi o negro que viu
A crueldade bem de frente
E ainda produziu milagres
De fé no extremo ocidente.

Atheists who have seen miracles as I have done
Know that where God is not, the gods
Don't disappear; they multiply.
The gods don't give up, for the sovereign heart,
Cannot be confined by slavery,
Cannot be confined by 'No'.
So much 'Yes' can never be confined;
The yes of dance / The yes of sex / The glorious yes
That arches across our history
Ojuobá came here / And saw this
. . .

It was the blacks / Who discovered Brazil
Face to face with inhumanity
They performed miracles
Miracles of faith in the far west.

Caetano Veloso, 'Milagres do Povo'
('Miracles of the People')

CANDOMBLÉ, the Afro-Brazilian religion of Salvador da Bahia, has for many years been the main focus of anthropological research into the African-derived religions of the new world. The analyses of the rituals and cosmology of the religion by Rodrigues and Bastide and accounts of life in the *terreiros*, or temples, of Candomblé by Landes, Carneiro and others[1] stress its African traits, its fidelity to sub-Saharan old-world traditions and its preservation of African tribal divinities, of a liturgy in the Yoruba language and of dances, systems of divination, animal sacrifice and herbal lore all directly traceable to an African origin. Historical and ethnographic researches by Verger in West Africa have established precise lineages for many of these features of Afro-Brazilian religious practice.[2] Later studies, for instance by Elbein,[3] have continued to interpret Candomblé as a transformation of African cosmology 'encysted', in Bastide's phrase, in modern Brazilian culture, rather than as a Brazilian form of spirituality, one among a number of other Afro-Brazilian cults.

The stress these authors put on the distinctively African character of Candomblé is the subject of critical discussion among contemporary scholars and adherents of Afro-Brazilian religions. The concern with Africanity, it is argued, led the earlier researchers to rely on data drawn from the minority of *terreiros* (cult houses) in Bahia that follow the Nagô and/or Jeje rites (which preserve Yoruba and Fon divinities and incantations in the Yoruba language) at the expense of other Afro-Bahian traditions derived from Bantu cultures which, generally speaking, incorporate a greater number of elements from popular Catholicism and Amerindian cultures. These traditions (Angola, Congo, Caboclo) are numerically better represented in contemporary Bahian religious practice, as Carneiro, at least, recognized.[4] The bias in the literature

1. Nina Rodrigues, *O Animismo Fetichista dos Negros Bahianos*, Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira 1935 (2nd edn.); Roger Bastide, *Candomblé da Bahia (Rito Nagô)*, São Paulo: Nacional 1961 [1958]; idem, *The African Religions of Brazil: Towards a Sociology of the Interpretation of Civilizations*, Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins 1978 [1960]; Ruth Landes, *The City of Women*, New York: Macmillan 1947; Edson Carneiro, *Candomblés da Bahia*, Salvador: Ed. Museu do Estado da Bahia 1948.

2. Pierre Fatumbi Verger, *Orixás: Deuses Iorubas na África e no Novo Mundo*, Salvador: Corrupio 1981.

3. Juana Elbein, *Os Nagô e A Morte*, Petrópolis: Vozes 1975.

4. Alejandro Frigerio, 'The Search for Africa: Proustian Nostalgia in Afro-Brazilian Studies', ms, Los Angeles: UCLA 1983.

towards the Nagô tradition and the consequent enhancement of the prestige of *terreiros* following this rite has been characterized by a Brazilian commentator as *yorubismo*. Candomblé, such critics maintain, is both more syncretic and more varied in its manifestations than the existing ethnography would suggest. The Jeje-Nagô houses, moreover, may themselves be more eclectic than has generally been described.[5] In this paper I present some background to the current situation in Bahia and some observations from a traditionalist *terreiro* concerning the relations between Candomblé and Catholicism. These are not intended to support one or other interpretation of Candomblé, but they serve to illustrate what may be called the creative ambiguity of the Brazilian religious imagination, a feature that has both preserved and transformed elements of each religion.

A system of correspondences with popular Catholicism is a time-honoured feature of Afro-Brazilian cults. Images of saints are found in most *terreiros* in Bahia, Jeje-Nagô included, alongside symbols of the *orixás*: St Lazarus with Omolu, the smallpox divinity; St George with Oxóssi, the patron of huntsmen; St Anthony with Ogum, god of war and iron; and the Virgin Mary, in her manifestation as Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception of the Beach, with Iemanjá, goddess of the sea and mother of the *orixás*. The equation of individual *orixás* with Catholic saints is reflected in the basic terminology of the *terreiros*, where initiates are known as *filhos-de-santo*, literally 'children of the saint', and priests and priestesses as *pai-de-santo* or *mãe-de-santo*, 'father' or 'mother' of the saint (there are Yoruba synonyms for the last two terms, namely *babalorixá* and *ialorixá*, and one for the daughter of a saint, namely *iaô*, but they are used less frequently). In Bahia, Oxalá, the most revered deity of the Candomblé pantheon, is popularly identified with Nosso Senhor do Bomfin, and the church of this name is the site of devotions by cult-followers each Friday, Oxalá's day in the Candomblé calendar. The cult of saints in popular Catholicism, particularly the practice of *promessas*, offerings in return for favours received, has a parallel, though not an exact one, in the offerings made by *filhos-de-santo* to their *orixá*. This cross-mapping of mythology and ritual, documented in detail for various Afro-Brazilian religions by Bastide, seems to have its origin in a stratagem adopted by slaves in the face of prohibitions on African religions, and it can be explained, in the case of Candomblé, simply as a way of worshipping African gods under a Christian guise.[6] The legal persecution of Afro-Brazilian cults, which continued until the 1960s, prolonged this stratagem, but it did not, in the opinion of Bastide, affect the fundamentally African metaphysic of Candomblé. His principle of compartmentalization, whereby the devotee of Candomblé could move

5. Vivaldo da Costa Lima, 'O Conceito de Nação nos Candomblés da Bahia', *Afro-Asia* (Salvador), Vol. XII (1976), pp. 65–91.

6. Bastide, *The African Religions of Brazil*. Though apparently this is not certain: see Yvonne Maggie, *Guerra de Orixá*, Rio de Janeiro: Zahar 1977, and João José Reis, 'Nas Malhas do Poder Escravista: A Invasão do Candomblé do Acre na Bahia, 1809', *Religião e Sociedade*, Vol. XIII, no. 3 (1986).

between a hermetic world of African religion and the wider context of Brazilian urban life without a blurring of categories, encouraged a view of Candomblé as pure and unchanging, whereas other cults, particularly those cults of more recent formation such as Umbanda, the most widespread and eclectic Afro-Brazilian religion, which incorporates elements of Kardecist spiritism as well as popular Catholicism, were seen as degraded and culturally compromised.

In recent years Umbanda has been the subject of more sustained attention on the part of researchers.[7] Their work represents a recognition that the common features of historically distinct religions may also form a metaphysical system, a lingua franca of the spirit. The complexity of religious practice in Brazil and the ambiguity of belief, where believers are moving between one set of religious symbols and another, makes the workings of this system hard to discern. However, in the case of popular Catholicism, spiritism and Afro-Brazilian cults, the key feature these religions have in common is the principle of mediation, a belief in the control of events in this world by transactions with supernatural entities (saints, spirits or *orixás*). Although there are important differences in the kinds of religious experience offered by these traditions—the role of prayer in Catholicism is eclipsed by trance in spiritism and Afro-Brazilian religions—it seems to be the principle of mediation that enables adherents to translate between belief systems, to change their allegiance or subsume their experience of one religion under the precepts of another.

In the case of Candomblé, there is no doubt that African features are preserved in a more striking form in the Jeje-Nagô rite than in other Afro-Brazilian religions.[8] To what extent this means that Jeje-Nagô *terreiros* still enshrine a sensibility, a world-view or metaphysical system that is usefully categorized as African (or West African, or Yoruba), and to what extent the outward African forms are animated by a religious experience that remains distinct from Christianity or Spiritism are questions that are most appropriately examined at the level of particular *terreiros* and in the experience of individual devotees of the religion. Despite the existence of a Federation of Afro-Brazilian Cults (Federação dos Cultos Afro-Brasileiros) and the recent creation of a new central council (the Conselho Religioso do Candomblé, or Religious Council of Candomblé), Candomblé has not developed a central organization of any authority; its sacred texts are orally transmitted, and ritual orthodoxy is maintained only by the lengthy initiation necessary to become a *mãe-* or *pai-de-santo*. The legitimation of a new Candomblé house is derived from the prestige of the *terreiro* where the *mãe-* or *pai-de-santo* was initiated, but

7. Peter Fry, *Para Inglês Ver*, Rio de Janeiro: Zahar 1982; idem, 'Gallus Africanus Est, ou, Como Roger Bastide se tornou Africano no Brasil', in Olga R. de Morães von Simson (ed.), *Revistando A Terra de Contrastes: A Atualidade da obra de Roger Bastide*, São Paulo: CERU/FFLCH/USP 1986; Maggie, *Guerra de Orixá*; Diana De G. Brown, *Umbanda: Religion and Politics in Urban Brazil*, Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press 1986.

8. Costa Lima, 'O Conceito', and 'Os Obás de Xangô' in *Olóórişá: Escritos sobre a Religião dos Orixás*, São Paulo: Agora 1981.

each is autonomous. As with the pastors of pentecostal churches, fast-growing rivals to Afro-Brazilian cults for the spiritual allegiance of poor, black Brazilians, the force of character of the founding priest or priestess is an important factor in the success of a new *terreiro*. Unlike Protestant pastors, *mães-* and *pais-de-santo* are not tied to a single sacred text (nor are they committed, as Protestants are, in theory at least, to reject other religions as snares and delusions). The reputation of particular *terreiros* waxes and wanes from generation to generation, although a small number have managed to maintain their influence since the last century. This institutional fluidity and the variety of Afro-Brazilian traditions means, for instance, that not every *pai-* or *mãe-de-santo* claiming to practise the Nagô rite would be recognized as actually doing so by a ritual specialist from one of the well-known Nagô houses. The Nagô orthodoxy itself has been modified within living memory, on the one hand by the almost universal incorporation of the cult of *caboclos*, native American spirits, alongside the *orixá* cult, and on the other by a conscious 're-Africanization' of the formal organization of some of the traditionalist *terreiros*.

For social scientists the maintenance of orthodoxy, the internal transformations of Afro-Brazilian cults, the resistance they offer to assimilation by the culture at large and, conversely, their influence on the wider field of Brazilian religious experience, are all questions of considerable theoretical interest. For those who live within the pale of faith they are questions of practical choice. A person with an interest in Candomblé will inevitably have attended services in Catholic churches and very likely Protestant ones as well. He or she will typically frequent a number of different *terreiros* before making a commitment to one in particular. Brazilian religious culture is dense and populous, a forest of belief. Syncretism is a response to this plenitude (as, in another fashion, is Protestantism). In individual lives, faiths may be intertwined; thus the variation between cults is complicated by variations in the relation that individual adherents have to the cult and to the world outside the *terreiro*.

Despite its elaborate preservation of ancient ritual, the Candomblé *terreiro* is by no means a closed community. One of its sources of strength is its incorporation of individuals of different sorts and conditions into the life of the *terreiro*. The core personnel are the *mãe-* or *pai-de-santo* and his or her *filhos-de-santo*, that is, those the *mãe* or *pai* has initiated into the religion. But among these there will be ones who have the capacity to enter trance, becoming possessed by *orixás*, and those who do not. Drummers, for instance, though they orchestrate the trance, do not themselves become possessed. There are also the *ogas* or *mogbas*, patrons of the *terreiro*, and *padrinhos*, or sponsors, of individual *filhos-de-santo*. Some of these will be chosen with their comparative wealth or influence in mind and will therefore tend to come from a different social milieu from the *filhos-de-santo*. All these individuals participate in a communal rite, but only some of them live permanently in the *terreiro*, so it is principally there that they meet their fellow adherents. Further towards the periphery of Candomblé, but crucial to its economic survival, are the day-to-day clients of the *pai-* or *mãe-de-santo*. Such people, from all classes and

walks of life, seek consultations for purposes of divination or magical intervention (in their own lives or those of others). They may know very little of the religion and probably do not attend the festivals of the *orixás*, even though these are open to all comers. Candomblé has a different meaning for each of these categories of person and plays a different part in their lives.

The relation between Christianity and Afro-Brazilian religions and the wider significance of the African cultural heritage in Brazil are matters of discussion well beyond the *terreiro* and the seminar room. In Bahia particularly, where Brazilians of largely African descent make up the greater part of the population, Afro-Brazilian religions have become explicit symbols of racial affirmation. In the current era of democratization in Brazil, this has given a new, specifically electoral dimension to the political importance they have always had, even in times of persecution. The *folklorização* of Candomblé—the promotion of its picturesque elements to encourage tourism and the staging of sacred dances for commercial interest—is routinely condemned as an act of cultural appropriation. At the same time, the figures of the *orixás* are beginning to be incorporated more openly into secular culture, in carnival floats or *blocos* and in the rhythms and lyrics of popular music, sometimes in a spirit of popular devotion, sometimes as part of a rhetoric of liberation from white economic and cultural domination. Among the Catholic clergy, the influence of liberation theology and the renewal of commitment to pastoral activity among the poor has led to greater interest in the values of folk religion, both popular Catholicism and Afro-Brazilian cults. The presence of Candomblé has become more visible, its prestige greater. This is doubtless a source of strength, but it may also be seen as a new kind of appropriation, a subtle transformation in the tenor of life in the *terreiros* and their relation to the wider world.

My experience of Candomblé is based on sporadic fieldwork during two periods of residence in Salvador, in 1986 and 1987. Although I came to Bahia with an Africanist background, my enquiries were shaped by wider ethnographic reportage which included accounts of communities in various parts of Brazil, so relations between Candomblé and other religious systems were of primary interest to me. I attended *festas-de-santo* and other rituals at various *terreiros*, particularly Ilê Axé Opó Aganju (the House of the Power of the Sign of Xangó), a Nagô *terreiro* in a small coastal town outside Salvador where I lived for a time in 1986. The *pai-de-santo*, Balbino Daniel de Paula, is a *filho* of Ilê Axé Opó Afonja, one of the most venerable houses of Candomblé in Bahia. He represents, therefore, at least as far as ritual goes, traditional Candomblé, the least syncretic, most 'African' kind. Balbino is in his mid-forties. He has had little formal education but enjoys, more than most *pais-de-santo*, extensive contact with Bahian intellectuals who interest themselves in Afro-Brazilian religion—writers, artists, musicians and social scientists. He has also visited Africa twice, a fact that gives him additional authority in the world of Candomblé. His *terreiro* is a spacious enclave of trees and shrines in the shadow of a high, white sand-dune, secluded but populous, with some half-dozen families and as many individuals in permanent residence. Though twenty kilometres distant from Salvador, it is regularly visited by people from the city.

These included, during the period of my stay, local politicans, popular musicians, a Catholic priest and the members of a Dahomean cultural delegation, as well as Balbino's *mogbas*, clients and non-resident *filhos-de-santo*. Ilê Axé Opó Aganju was thus a fair vantage-point for monitoring the everyday life of Candomblé, the gossip world of a *terreiro* and sporadic discourse concerning its relation to other religions.

There was nothing visibly syncretic about Ilê Axé Opó Aganju. A hut by the gate concealed the phallic emblem of Exú, the trickiest of Yoruba deities, guardian of paths and crossroads. Exú is a mercenary deity, often invoked in rituals of magical vengeance and self-aggrandizement that are a significant part of a *pai-de-santo*'s day-to-day business. For this reason he has long been identified by Christian missionaries in Brazil as the Devil (in the iconography of Umbanda, Exús are represented as red homunculi with horns and tails). These days, only Protestant pastors make an explicit identification of Exú with the Devil; in the Protestant view, all Afro-Brazilian spirits are demons of one kind or another. But the figure of Exú reveals a crucial lack of fit between the moral systems of Candomblé and Christianity, one that no system of correspondences can bridge. The Candomblé vision of the world is permeated by witchcraft; it does not make the same dichotomy between good and evil as the Christian tradition; its deities are not paragons but have both good and bad characteristics in the manner of the gods of Greece and Rome; and its public rituals deal not with guilt and the forgiveness of sins but with the ecstatic transcendence of jealousy and competition.[9]

In Balbino's *terreiro*, the main public rituals, the *festas-de-santo*, took place in a large building opposite the main gate, the *barracão*. These rituals involve trance-possession of the devotee by one or other of these gods (though not by Exú). The *orixá* is summoned by drums to take over (*pegar*) the body of his *filho-de-santo*. A possessed person dancing is regarded as the embodiment of the god: in the trance, his or her comportment changes, often dramatically, to correspond to the mythic character of the *orixá*, who may be of a different age and/or sex. The *filho-de-santo* often has little subsequent recollection of his trance, even though this can last several hours and involve quite violent exertions.

In many *terreiros*, though not in Balbino's, these ceremonies occur under the gaze of Catholic saints, as described above. (At Ilê Axé Opó Aganju the saints were present, but confined to the reception-room in Balbino's house, along with secular memorabilia.) Participants in *festas-de-santo*, which usually occur on Saturday nights, see no contradiction in attending mass the following day, though few do so. If asked they will almost invariably describe themselves as Catholics. In the census for Lauro de Freitas, the municipality where Balbino's *terreiro* was situated, 32,741 out of a population of 35,431 declared themselves Catholics and only 38 as adherents of an Afro-Brazilian religion. The figure was clearly absurd: more than this number of *filhos-de-santo* came to any given

9. Rubem César Fernandes, 'Aparecida, Our Queen, Lady and Mother, Saravá!', ms, Rio de Janeiro: Museu Nacional 1984.

festa at Ilê Axé Opó Afonja and there were half-a-dozen other *terreiros* in the near vicinity. But there were reasons for the underestimate: historically, discretion has been advisable in revealing such affiliations—hence the correspondence between saints and *orixás*—and Catholicism is still associated with the apparatus of the state, including census-takers. So for the purposes of the census, Balbino explained to me, fingering the gold crucifix he wore around his neck, that he was a Catholic himself. 'Everyone is a Catholic,' he said; 'we are born Catholics. We are Catholics first, before we become *filho-de-santo*. It is our birthright. It is like citizenship.' In this instance Balbino spoke of Catholicism as though it were a secular power rather than a rival religion. For him, it seemed, acknowledging its claims on the inhabitants of the *terreiro* was not so much a religious observance as a rendering unto Caesar.

Catholicism can function, however, in a significant way, as a ritual supplement to Candomblé. Despite the elaborate ceremonials of Afro-Brazilian cults, they lack formal rites of passage for two important events: birth and marriage. The second of these is not of great importance: weddings are costly; most *filhos-de-santo* are poor and few of them are formally married (*terreiros*, moreover, offer a metaphorical family for those who fall outside conventional kinship units; for this reason and others they attract a high proportion of single mothers and homosexuals). Baptism, however, is considered a necessity. I asked the mother of a new-born child, herself a *filha-de-santo* of Iansã, the most powerful of the female *orixás*, why she wanted him baptized. She replied, puzzled and amused, 'Because I don't want him to grow up a pagan.' She did not mean, of course, that she did not want her child to participate in the religion of the *orixás*—he would doubtless be initiated when his *orixá* manifested itself—rather, she wanted him to have the best of both worlds, since he had to live in two. Baptism was a mark of citizenship, of status in the world outside the *terreiro*.

At death, a *filho-de-santo* is subject to Catholic and Candomblé rituals at the same time. An extended Candomblé ceremony, the *axexê*, coincides with the Christian burial but does not supplant it. When Mãe Menininha of Gantóis, the most celebrated of all *mães-de-santo* in Brazil, died in 1986, she was interred with some pomp in a Catholic cemetery; a mass was sung over her grave at the same time as the *axexê* began in her *terreiro*. Such ritual simultaneity, it should be stressed, is evidence not of syncretism but rather of its opposite, complementarity, or, to use Fry's term, symbiosis. Only at a single point in the funerary ceremonies do the two religions come together. At the *axexê* for Carlinhos, a *mogba* of Ilê Axé Opó Aganju who died an untimely death in 1987, the week-long ritual concluded with a silent prayer, eyes closed and hands together in the Christian manner. Afterwards, I asked Balbino who we had been praying to. 'God', he said. 'But which god?' I asked. 'The god who is *up there*', said Balbino.

In a commentary on the second World Orixá Conference, an international meeting of practitioners and analysts of Yoruba-derived religions held in Salvador in 1983, Fry detected two strains of thought about the Catholic Church among the *candomblezeiros* (his term for the adherents of Candomblé).

Mãe Stela, of Ilê Axé Opó Afonja, would have no truck with syncretism. Slaves had needed it, she said, but it was no longer necessary. She wished to abolish the correspondences between *orixás* and figures of Christian mythology. She also opposed the assimilation of the *orixás* to secular rituals, notably their appearance in carnival processions. Mãe Stela was supported by four other leading Bahian *mães-de-santo*, including Mãe Menininha, but a number of *pais-de-santo* disagreed. Balbino was among them. 'Syncretism', he said,

> only exists in a few external aspects of the Yoruba cult. It makes no difference if you dethrone the images of Catholic saints in the *terreiros*. Candomblé and Catholicism are like water and oil—you can put them in the same glass but they won't mix.[10]

Balbino frequently used this image when asked about syncretism. Sometimes he would shake drops of *dendê* oil into a bowl of water to make the analogy visible. The viscous, red oil of the *dendê* palm (*Elaeis guineensis*), which is of African origin, is an important ingredient in offerings to the *orixás*, so the contrast with water—holy water—has a special appositeness. But the image was not entirely unambiguous: purification by water is also an important feature of Candomblé, the annual *festa* for Oxalá is called the Waters of Oxalá, and the syncretic ceremony at the Church of Bomfim centres on the ritual washing of the church steps. Luís da Muriçoca, a *pai-de-santo* who supported Balbino's position on syncretism, told the *candomblezeiros* at the Orixá Conference:

> I know very well that Our Lord of Bomfin is not Oxalá, but nobody is going to take his statue away from my *peji* [altar of an *orixá*]. I have been to mass on Fridays at Bomfin since I was a boy. Our grandparents taught us to do this.

Fry also noted a difference of opinion within the Catholic hierarchy. The then Cardinal-Archbishop of Salvador, Dom Avelar Brandão, was reported as remarking, in response to Mãe Stela's anti-syncretic petition, that if the adherents of Candomblé rejected syncretism they would be renouncing Christianity. This, he opined, would be bad for both Church and Candomblé. On the other hand, the auxiliary Bishop, Dom Boaventura, while doubting that there was any real likelihood of an end to syncretism, argued for the elimination of its more 'absurd' aspects. 'The two religions', he was reported as saying,

> are intimately linked, at least in Bahia, but we must put an end to this. Syncretism is illogical, contradictory, absurd. Nowadays, on the feast of Our Lady, people don't know whether they are paying homage to her or to Iemanjá.

So the ambiguous coexistence of the two religions had critics and apologists among both Catholic clergy and *pais-* and *mães-de-santo*. But the *progressista* wing of the Catholic Church, to which neither Dom Avelar nor Dom Boaventura belonged, had a more radical critique of syncretism. At Ilê Axe

10. *Veja*, 17 August 1983, quoted in P. Fry, 'De Um Observador Não-Participante...Reflexões sobre Alguns Recortes de Jornal acerca de II Conferência Mundial da Tradição dos Orixás e Cultura, realizada em Salvador, Julho de 1983', *Communicações de ISER*, 1983, pp. 37–46.

Opo Aganju, padres inspired by liberation theology visited the *terreiro* from time to time to study Candomblé and offer their services as, in effect, auxiliary ritual specialists. Padre Heitor, a young Italian priest, performed the baptism of the child referred to above in the reception-room of Balbino's house, where the symbols of the *orixás* had been discreetly covered with a sheet, leaving only the saints on show. It was a gesture that harked back to the era of police persecution of the *terreiros*, but the relation between padre and *pai-de-santo* was well and truly changed. Padre Heitor's predecessor, a Frenchman named François de l'Epinay, had even been initiated as a *mogba* of the *terreiro*. 'If you ask if I believe in the *orixás*,' he had told Heitor, 'I would say, "Yes, I believe in the *orixás*! And I believe in Jesus Christ! I believe in both!" '[11]

There was an irony in Padre François's rapprochement with Candomblé. Having discarded the high rituals and ancient liturgical language of his own Church as obstacles to achieving rapport with the people,[12] he had immersed himself—and Padre Heitor was following suit—in the arcana, the mysteries, of a tradition that was, for all the popular participation it enjoys, equally esoteric. *Progressista* padres spoke of religious pluralism and the presence of God in Candomblé, the intensity of faith shown by its devotees, the historical errors of the Church in the forcible baptism of slaves. It was a heartfelt discourse, yet it could also be shown to conform to the interests of the missionary Church, which thereby drew closer to the source of the religion with which it shared the allegiance of the people. The padres found God in the *orixás* as *candomblezeiros* had once found the *orixás* in the veneration of saints. They were sincere dissemblers, immersing their faith in another religious culture for the greater glory of their own.

But Padre François's exclamation ('I believe in both!') may be beside the point. In Candomblé nobody ever asks the question, 'Do you believe?' It is a religion not of creeds but of observances. In this sense it is the opposite of Western Christianity, or at least Protestantism (it is noteworthy that the slang term for a Protestant in Brazil is simply *crente*, 'believer'). At the heart of Candomblé is a dance, a visible leap of faith, a wordless submission to possession by the deity. This is a religious experience so spectacular that the question of belief is otiose. Candomblé does not demand a profession of belief, though it can induce a change of life. It may be that the symbiosis of Candomblé and Catholicism owes something to the different emphasis Candomblé gives to key aspects of religious experience. It celebrates the quality and intensity of such experience rather than consistency of belief, and it privileges discontinuity of personal identity, the irruption of divinity into the body of the devotee. Such ecstatic episodes, different from anything found in mainstream Christianity, also offer a clue to the easy integration of aspects of two religions in a single life. If the *filho-de-santo* can cease to be his or her everyday self and become an African god, there would seem to be no reason why he or she cannot sometimes also be a Catholic. These discontinuities in

11. Heitor Frisotti, 'Um Padre no Candomblé', *Sem Fronteiras*, Nov.–Dec. 1986, pp. 15–18.

12. F. de l'Epinay, 'Fé e Cultura', *Communicações de ISER*, Oct. 1986.

personal identity constitute a problem for Christian moral theology, though they make sense as responses to the demands of life in a culturally hybrid urban society. Similarly, the emphasis on magical manipulation of the world in Afro-Brazilian religions is hard to reconcile with Christian doctrine. The *progressista* position on Candomblé, rejecting syncretism but bringing the two religions together in a single embrace of faith, can be maintained only by passing over these divergences. Holy water and *dendê* oil, to use Balbino's metaphor, can be shaken together but they will not stay mixed. The present tendency in Brazil, a democratic tendency, encouraged by people of goodwill on both sides, to elevate Candomblé to a place alongside Catholicism, is quite proper. But speaking of the two religions as though they were comparable in every respect may obscure the very differences that enable them to co-exist.

Carmelo Lisón-Tolosana

THE *BEATAE*: FEMININE RESPONSES TO CHRISTIANITY IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY CASTILE

The first half of the sixteenth century and the kingdom of Castile compose a spatio-temporal arena in which a struggle unfolded between Christian tradition and modernization. The leading protagonists were women seeking a solution to what is, essentially, an age-old dilemma. Let us explore the culturally specific mode of discourse and action of these deeply religious women who proposed a new, feminine approach to Christianity.[1]

Such women were known as *beatae*, a term which, although used earlier in different contexts, began in the closing decades of the fifteenth century to be applied to women who, without being nuns, dedicated themselves to lives of marked religious observance and reflection. The word *beata*—'blessed one'—seems already at that time to have had ironic overtones: it conveyed the idea of an exaggerated, affected display of religiosity, and this slightly pejorative meaning is the one that prevails today.

Beatae, in the sense of contemplative, fervent and devout women, often visionaries and miracle-workers, already abounded in Castile during the final two decades of the fifteenth century; but, to be fully appreciated, their emergence must be seen against the backcloth of their curious historical period.

1. Few scholars are familiar with this feminine movement, at its height in sixteenth-century Castile, and certainly it has not to my knowledge been studied from an anthropological perspective. Its significance has not, in fact, been noticed, let alone remarked upon before. The decline of this movement had set in by the seventeenth century, and it is scarcely remembered today. The information in this essay is taken mostly from A. Huerga, *Historia de los alumbrados 1570–1630*, Madrid 1978, and M. Andrés Martín, *Los Recogidos: Nueva visión de la mística española 1500–1700*, Madrid 1975 (Fund univ. española, Monographs nos. 31 and 13 respectively), both of which, of course, consider the question mainly from a theological point of view.