

CHARLES DELLON'S *RELATION DE L'INQUISITION*
DE GOA AS A SITE OF CONFLICT BETWEEN A
THEOCENTRIC AND AN ANTHROPOCENTRIC WORLD¹

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A year after his arrest by the Inquisition in Daman, Charles Dellon in his book *Relation de l'Inquisition de Goa* recalls that in 1675,

I had entertained the most pernicious intentions, and that my design was to teach and inculcate heretical opinions; that I had consequently incurred the penalty of the greater Excommunication; that my property was confiscated to the crown, and myself delivered over to the secular power, to be punished for my crimes according to law, that is, to be burnt (p. 106).

This accusation pronounced by the Inquisition in Goa encompasses the long-standing conflict between Reformation and Counter-Reformation, between the urge to maintain an ancient theocracy and the urge to replace it with the anthropo-crazy of human industry, a conflict that had begun during the renaissance and had been carried into the colonies of the two maritime powers of the time, Spain and Portugal. The journeys of discovery and the «heretical» means that made them possible, undermined the theocratic pyramid, but ironically also announced the death of the

¹ Charles Dellon, *Relation de l'Inquisition de Goa*, 1819, University of Pittsburgh online collection. Parts of this paper have appeared in my article on «*Guardian of the Dawn to a Murky Past*» published earlier this year in *Hispanic Horizon*.

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renaissance principles of humanism. Out of its ashes, here, and in the other colonies, arose systems of domination both imperial and religious to re-establish the theocracy of the faithful.

Everywhere they went, the conquistadores, both Portuguese and Spanish were accompanied by priests. The Portuguese proved to be both more venturesome and gullible. Chasing the dream of reaching the kingdom of the legendary Prestor John and the fabulous spice islands, they stepped into India and discovered the presence of Sephardic Jews who after being expelled from Portugal had by then established themselves in India! The stage was set for the eastern colony to become the battle-ground for contenders of *«pureza de fe»* and their victims – both Sephardic Jews and the Conversos of the Indian colony.

It was not surprising then, that although the spice trade had provided the initial impetus for Portuguese imperial ventures, proselytization soon became the main focus and only four decades after Vasco da Gama's «discovery» of Goa in 1498 the Catholic Church opened up Asia for all its Religious Orders. In this context, its rise to the dignity of the Archbishopric and Primary of the East Indies indicated a new importance that the Portuguese rulers and the Catholic Church now endowed Goa with, the aim being nothing less than to make Goa the Rome of the Orient with a substantial Christian following. By the time Charles Dellon himself came to the East Indies, the Christian Faith had become the cornerstone of Portuguese imperialist policies for, as Eduardo Moreira points out, “In the Faith was centered the national centrifugal force which produced martyrs and saints; while in the imposed Empire was the centripetal force which garnered the produce of the mission fields—gold, pepper, ivory, and slaves. The Faith gave; the Empire took»².

Around 1560, just fourteen years before Dellon was arrested under the Inquisition, the Inquisition was established³ in Goa on the insistent demand of Saint Francis Xavier to King John III for arresting the back-slide of the so-called ‘rice Christians’. Of interest to this paper is that it was in 1560 itself that Gaspar de Leon Pereyra was consecrated the Archbishop of Goa and the two Inquisitors Alexio

² Moreira, 1957.

³ In Goa, the Inquisition would be suspended in 1774 only to be re-established in 1779. It was finally abolished in 1812, and its Palace was pulled down in 1820.

Dias Falcão and Francisco Marques, arrived from Lisbon. Dom Gaspar focused his on the Jews of Asia who declared their faith openly here, beyond the effective reach of the Inquisition in Portugal, and to whom he hoped to prove the truth of Christianity. According to the Inquisitors, «one of the reasons that a person of Dom Gaspar's temperament and energy was needed in Goa was, the appearance of numerous New Christians along the Malabar coast [...] whose discourse with those who are here already, [was] very prejudicial to the purity and the conservation of the faith»⁴. It was around this time that the court physician of John II, Master Antonio was writing the *Ajuda de Fe* a milder re-worked version of Jeronim de Santa Fe's *Ad convincendum perfidiam judaicam*. This was soon followed by Diogo de Sá's «Inquiry», and João de Barros' *Décadas*. The polemics generated by these works served in part to whip up Inquisitorial fever both at home and in the colonies. And «there [followed] 280 years of burnings at the stake, witnessed by the peoples of Lisbon, Coimbra, Evora, and, in India, Goa»⁵. Sir William Hunter tells us that «At first the establishment [of Inquisition in Goa] was of a modest and tentative character; the functionaries numbering only five, and the whole salaries amounting in 1565 to £71 a year»⁶. There are records which indicate that from these modest beginnings, the establishment of Inquisition grew and in the 200 years of Portuguese domination in Goa, approximately 16,000 trials took place under the Inquisition and thousands were killed in the *autos da fe*⁷. As for the character of the Inquisition in Goa, Charles Dellon in his *Relation de l'Inquisition de Goa* remarks that, «the Inquisition in Spain is more severe than that in Italy, and less so than that in Portugal and its colonies» (p. 17)⁸.

⁴ Talmage, 1981, p. 270.

⁵ Moreira, 1957.

⁶ Hunter, 2005, p. 253.

⁷ As the Palace of the Inquisition in Goa was burned down in 1812, exact numbers are difficult to arrive at.

⁸ As late as 1935, Dr. Antonio de Oliviera Salazar, the president of Portugal, went on record saying that there was only one religion in the country [Portugal] as also but one national policy, and that, should other lines of thought make their appearance, they would be suppressed. See Moreira, 1957.

The historical evidence of Goa under the Portuguese appears in archives such as the ones C. R. Boxer⁹ lists, but going on what he observes, they do not give us much in terms of personal testimonies to acts of religious zealotry which took place in Goa. However, the nature of these experiences can be apprehended from the widely circulated accounts of personal suffering under the Inquisition in other parts of the world which include the experiences of Louis Ramé in the Mexican Inquisition titled *An Account of the Cruelties Exercis'd by the Inquisition in Portugal*, (1708), and *The Tryal and Sufferings of Mr. Isaac Martin, who was put into Inquisition in Spain for the Sake of the Protestant Religion* (London, 1723).

Within this set of testimonies to Inquisition, Charles, sometimes referred to as Gabriel Dellon's *Relation de l'Inquisition de Goa* is one of a cluster written by French travelers¹⁰ who brought back accounts of their experiences overseas as well as those under the Spanish/Portuguese Inquisition. Dellon's *Relation* is proof that innocent people were drawn into the net of Inquisition, and not always the natives. Europeans visiting the colonies were also drawn in, as was the case with Dellon. Dellon first published his testimony in 1687 in Leiden and then in 1688 in Paris, more than four years after it was written and almost a decade after his return as the personal physician of Prince of Conti. The delay was caused by his fear of the Inquisition for, «the dread of the horrible tortures inflicted on those convicted of breaking the oath of secrecy imposed before their liberty is restored, renders the mysteries of the Inquisition so impenetrable that it is almost impossible ever to learn the truth, without being so unfortunate as to be conducted into its prisons» (Dellon, *Relation de l'Inquisition de Goa*, p. 18). Dellon's *Relation* was initially seen as a representative of the Gallican policy adopted by Louis XIV and accused of being pro-Calvinist. However, and maybe because of that, it enjoyed immense popularity at the time, being rapidly translated in English, German and Dutch and was one of the main sources used by Philip Van Limborgh for his *Historia Inquisitionis*, published in 1692. Partly on the recommendation of the influential Cardinal Ciampini who felt that «this book should be banned without hesita-

⁹ Boxer, 1952.

¹⁰ Tavernier, Freyre, Pyrad de Laval were some of them.

tion on the grounds that it is highly dangerous to religion»¹¹, the *Relation* was put on the Index in 1690. Nevertheless, the *Relation* continued to be popular and was published many times until far into the eighteenth and even the beginning of the nineteenth century. In more contemporary times, an annotated edition by Charles Amiel and Anna Lima appeared in Paris in 1997.

I was able to access the 1819 edition of Pittsburgh. In this edition, the testimony appears without chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 42 and 43, of the original account, for as the Translator felt «it would tend only to increase the size and expense of the book» (p. xi). The Translator gives us only the titles of these chapters, which hint that they had contained an account of Dellon's voyages and descriptions of the Malabar Coast, Ceylon, Goa, Bassein, Daman and other small towns. What we can gather from the titles of these chapters is that Dellon knew Goa from his travels before he was finally confined there by the Inquisition.

At the time his ordeal began, Dellon was just 24 years old. He left France in 1668 and travelled extensively along the coast of Malabar. He later worked as a practicing physician in Daman. In 1674 he was arrested by the Inquisition and sent to Goa to stand trial. There seem to be two principle reasons for Dellon's denunciation to the Inquisition: alleged heresy, and personal jealousy. Dellon while professing his Catholic Faith admits that, «I disputed freely with Heretics and Schismatics. I possessed several books upon the subject, and have received much information both from discourse and study, during the leisure afforded by my voyages, and my residence in various parts of India» (Dellon, *Relation de l'Inquisition de Goa*, p. 23). During a discussion on the baptismal rites of the Church with the Dominican priests he was staying with in Daman, Dellon, «merely for the sake of argument and not from doubt» expresses his views on the three types of baptisms allowed under the Catholic Church, and his doubts regarding the efficacy of the *Flaminis*. To support his view Dellon quotes John (John iii, 5) (Dellon, *Relation de l'Inquisition de Goa*, p. 24). On another occasion, he refuses to kiss the cabinet bearing the painted image of the Virgin that the Portuguese were in the habit of carrying around, into which the devout could drop money if they chose to. Dellon tells us, »I sometimes refused to receive and kiss the

¹¹ Luarsen, 2002, p. 102.

cabinet», —«whence it was concluded that I despised the image and was consequently heretical» (Dellon, *Relation de l'Inquisition de Goa*, p. 25). Later, on two separate incidences, Dellon questions the attribution of Divinity to an image, and even quotes the Council of Trent to the effect. Dellon persists in not wearing the rosary. But, «what tended more than anything [*sic*] to my imprisonment and condemnation» was his defense of a certain Father Ephraim de Nevers —a capuchin monk arrested about seventeen years earlier, as “more virtuous and more enlightened than those who had caused him to be immured in a prison without permission even to repeat his breviary» (Dellon, *Relation de l'Inquisition de Goa*, p. 29). He concluded the conversation by saying that «I thought it was fortunate for France that this severe Tribunal had not been introduced there and most happy for myself that I was not subject to its jurisdiction» (p. 30). All these incidences were reasons enough for imprisonment under the Inquisition, but there was one more. Dellon himself asserts «An unfounded jealousy imbibed against me by the governor of Damaun was the true cause of the persecutions I have suffered from the ministers of the Inquisition» (Dellon, *Relation de l'Inquisition de Goa*, pp. 21–22). Dellon's assertion may have some truth, for as Cottineau de Kloguen notes, «the governors, powerful men, and the corrupted part of the clergy, took too often advantage of the vicious way in which justice was administered in that tribunal, to satisfy their private vengeance and hatred»¹².

Dellon tells us that the provincial prisoners of the Inquisition would be kept in the prisons of their own cities till the opportunity rose for their convenient transfer to Goa. Dellon himself was detained in the prisons at Daman and Bassien, awaiting the fleet which could take him and his fellow prisoners to Goa. On his arrival in Goa, Dellon was conducted to a vile «prison of the Ordinary, that is, of the Archbishop of Goa, called by the Portuguese *Al Jouvar*» (Dellon, *Relation de l'Inquisition de Goa*, p. 48). On 16th of January, he was conducted to the Santa Casa, as the palace of Inquisition was called, and his hopes of having been held on secular charges failed. In spite of becoming his own accusatory as required by the Inquisition, Dellon's possessions were listed, and he was imprisoned.

¹² Cottineau de Kloguen, 1995, p. 40.

Dellon's testimony is remarkable in that contains a rare portraits of the now extant Santa Casa which was once situated «on one side the great square, opposite the cathedral dedicated to St. Catharine». Dellon describes in details, the layout of offices, prison cells, the functionaries and the daily routine of the prisoners including their sessions with the Grand Inquisitor of the Indies of the time whom Dellon names as Francisco Delgado Ematos. The despair brought upon by his long confinement led Dellon to attempt suicide several times, but the vigilance of the guards foiled him. After two years of torture, the Inquisitorial Tribunal pardoned Dellon but imposed on him his participation in an *auto da fe* which has given us a rare, minutely detailed portrait of the proceedings of an *auto da fe* conducted in Goa. Later, his property was confiscated and he was condemned to five years to the galley¹³. Put upon a ship Dellon reached Lisbon via a prison term in Brazil and pleaded his case before the Grand Tribunal. The Tribunal granted him his freedom on the intervention of Louis XIV's confessor Bishop Bossuet and in 1677 Dellon returned to France to become the personal physician of the Prince of Conti.

When Dellon's account appeared at the threshold of the Age of Enlightenment, the Inquisition had begun to be polemical, to be perceived not only as a zealot, but also as a political force that suppressed intellect and inquiry into religious matters. This polemic was the deepening of the shift that had begun in the 15th century Europe, the shift from a theocentric world to an anthropocentric one. Dellon's account evinces what Iris M Zavala calls the «anotropic eye» the «upside-down perception [which] [...] focus[es] on the specific mechanisms which have served to dominate»¹⁴. When he questions the hegemony of specific religious practices it is not necessarily a heretical act in itself, but is an instance of the epistemological shift of the human consciousness. It is a cognitive processing at work that culminates in the «Age of Enlightenment» —not in its advocacy of instrumental reasoning, its foregrounding of the subjective, or its skeptical and materialistic extremes, but in its finalization of the journey from heliocentrism to theocentrism to anthropocentrism— an

¹³ By this time in history, galleys no longer refers to slave ships, but was the name of the secular prison which formed the abode of the prisoners of the Inquisition.

¹⁴ Zavala, 1992, p. 1.

end which finally places man as the sense-making center of all human activities including religious ones. The doctrine of Páramo which justified Inquisition as *a priori*, came under attack in the Age of Enlightenment and drew upon Hobbs' and Rousseau's arguments about God and his nature which differ in one fundamental way from the theocentric age: the arguments are for tolerance of religious differences as opposed to the hegemony of zealotry. Dellon's opinions of the religious practices as recorded in the *Relation* did not advocate atheism or heresy as claimed by the Inquisitorial Tribunal but human inquiry into the rigidity of religious dogma. This was echoed in Hobbes upholding the subjugation of the Church to the State and supporting the idea that democracy with the space for the exercise of individual choice that it creates is the most natural form of governance of a society. In the same vein, Montesquieu drew together religious intolerance, economic and political failure and rejection of reason as obvious factors leading to national failures in terms of social productivity and individual liberty, as in the case of Spain and Portugal. Voltaire's use of the term Inquisition to define all repressive state mechanisms is the jewel in the crown of Enlightenment and a tribute to all those who suffered religious persecution. Dellon's error lay not in questioning religious practices, but in that chose his discussants unwisely and so made himself vulnerable to condemnation. Dellon's book gained popularity because it upheld the anthropocentric ideal as against the theocentric zealotry. Though Dellon's account distances itself from the colonized subjects of Goa, we can't help but realize that he, along with the *ilustrados* and the other testifiers to the Inquisition «participated» as Antonio Gramsci says, «in completely or in part in the movement of moral and intellectual reform [...] that modern man [sic] can and should live without religion»¹⁵ or at the very least, a world without religious zealotry. I find myself echoing Gramsci's words that «it seems to me a civil accomplishment that should not be lost»¹⁶.

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