

Brazilian Messianism and National Institutions: A Reappraisal of Canudos and Joazeiro

RALPH DELLA CAVA*

DURING THE last two decades of the Empire, and throughout the "Old Republic" (1889-1930), the Brazilian Northeast witnessed the emergence of two popular religious movements. One was led by the mystic, Antônio Conselheiro. His "holy city" of about eight thousand sertanejos flourished in the Bahian town of Canudos from 1893 until its destruction by Brazilian federal troops in 1897.¹ The other unfolded in 1889 at Joazeiro, a rural hamlet in the verdant Cariry Valley in the southernmost corner of Ceará state. This "mystical city" and its leader, the suspended Roman Catholic priest, Father Cícero Romão Batista, survived for almost half a century despite the hostility of Church and State.² When

* The author is Assistant Professor of History at Queens College of the City University of New York.

¹ The discussion of Canudos in this paper draws heavily upon the English version of the Brazilian literary classic by Euclides da Cunha, *Rebellion in the Backlands* (Chicago, 1944). Its distorted image of the mystic, Antônio Conselheiro, is partially corrected in Abelardo Montenegro, *Antônio Conselheiro* (Fortaleza, 1954). For further bibliography on Canudos, see note 5.

² The bibliography on Father Cícero and Joazeiro is extensive. Only a few sources are noted here. Among those of a sensationalist nature are Alencar Peixoto, *Joazeiro do Cariry* ([Fortaleza?] 1913) and Edmar Morel, *Padre Cícero, o Santo do Juazeiro* (Rio de Janeiro, 1946). Father Cícero's place in Brazilian folklore is treated in Luís da Câmara Cascudo, *Vaqueiros e cantadores* (Pôrto Alegre, 1939) and Leonardo Mota, *Cantadores* (Fortaleza, n.d.). Biased but valuable eyewitness accounts of Joazeiro are Xavier de Oliveira, *Beatos e canaceiros* (Rio de Janeiro, 1920) and Manoel Diniz, *Mistérios do Joazeiro* (Juazeiro, 1935). A heated revival of the ecclesiastical controversy generated by the miracle of Joazeiro is the subject of recent studies by Antônio Gomes de Araújo, "Apostolado do Embuste," *Itaytera* (Crato), II (1956), 3-63 and his "À margem de 'À margem da história do Ceará,'" *Itaytera*, VIII (1962), 5-19. An opposing viewpoint is sustained by another priest, Azarias Sobreira, *Em defesa de um abolicionista* (Fortaleza, 1956) and in his recent series of articles entitled "Padre Cícero, enigma de hontem e de hoje" which appeared in the Fortaleza daily newspaper, *O Povo*, between October 1965 and February 1966. Among the psychological studies about Father Cícero are Manuel do Nascimento Fernandes Távora, "O Padre Cícero," *Revista do Instituto do Ceará*, (hereafter cited as *RIC*), 57 (1943), 268-281; and Lourenço Filho, *Joazeiro do Padre Cícero* (São Paulo, 1926). Among the pioneering critical studies are: Joaquim Alves, "Juá-

he died at the age of ninety in 1934, Joazeiro and its 35,000 inhabitants constituted the second largest *município* in Ceará. Today it is the largest population center in the sertão of the Brazilian Northeast.

The nature of these two movements has been interpreted in several ways. Late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century views based on psychological, racial, and geographic determinism, however, are today considered to be inadequate.³ The cherished view that these movements are the consequence of religious "fanaticism" among the backlanders, moreover, is refuted in a recent study by the late political essayist, Rui Facó. Facó clearly shows that the concept "fanaticism" as a tool of analysis begs the question.⁴

A more recent and perhaps more plausible analysis is offered by the Paulista sociologist, Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz. She regards these movements as "messianic," i.e., as folk movements which have "as [their] fulcrum an individual who believes himself to possess supernatural attributes and who prophesies catastrophes from which only his followers will be saved." The followers in their turn "seek either to discover the [celestial] Kingdom or to found a Holy City."⁵ This analysis goes far beyond any previous attempt to understand the internal social factors that bind the messianic leader and his followers into a single movement. It shows how popular religious beliefs underlie the value system of such movements and how they may even transform the movements into vehicles of popular social protest.⁶

With respect to the internal social cohesion of the movements at Canudos and Joazeiro, we can for the most part accept Queiroz' de-
zeiro, cidade mística,' *RIC*, 62 (1948), 73-101; and Abelardo Montenegro, *História do fanatismo religioso no Ceará* (Fortaleza, 1959).

³ For an excellent critique of these views, see the important study by Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz, *O messianismo—no Brasil e no mundo* (São Paulo, 1965).

⁴ Rui Facó, *Cangaceiros e fanáticos* (Rio de Janeiro, 1963). Part I, 9-71, discusses the concept of "fanaticism," its origins, and its lack of utility as a tool or category of analysis.

⁵ Queiroz, *O messianismo*, 283. Consult her bibliography for the extensive literature which exists on the subject of messianism; also her bibliography on Canudos. A pioneering analysis of messianism in Joazeiro is by Montenegro, *História do fanatismo*.

⁶ There is a substantial disagreement about the ideological nature of messianic movements. Queiroz, *O messianismo*, 307, contends that they may be reformist or conservative in regard to values and the existing political order, but never revolutionary. Facó, *Cangaceiros*, Chapter 5, sees them as constituting a new passive, now active, class reaction against the dominant structures. A new work which also deals with this problem—based on a case study of the "Contestado" outbreak in the Brazilian South—is Maurício Vinhas de Queiroz, *Messianismo e conflito social (a Guerra Sertaneja do Contestado, 1912-1914)* (Rio de Janeiro, 1966).

scription of them as "messianic." A crucial part of her analysis, however, cannot be accepted. She contends that these movements evolve within the culturally distinct and geographically isolated backlands society, designated as "rustic," *in contrast* to a culturally advanced and technologically modern society, designated as "urbanized." This merely repeats in sociological terms Euclides da Cunha's notion of the duality of Brazilian society: two or more societal units existing simultaneously and independently of each other.⁷ Queiroz seems to imply further that messianic movements are unrelated to a common national historical process when she writes that "rustic and urbanized societies, within the global Brazilian society, far more often coexist in parallel than do they interpenetrate each other. . . ."⁸

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the popular religious movements at Canudos and Joazeiro were from the outset not isolated from, but rather were intimately tied into the national ecclesiastical and political power structures of imperial and republican Brazil; and that they were also enmeshed within a changing nationwide economy.

Let us begin by examining some aspects of Roman Catholicism in the Brazilian Northeast during the second half of the nineteenth century. This subject has received so little attention in the past that it merits a detailed discussion, especially since neither Canudos nor Joazeiro can be properly understood outside of the changing ecclesiastical context of this period.

For the northeastern Church, the 1860s marked the beginnings of a threefold reform: a return of the Church to the people, especially the lower classes, previously abandoned by the clergy and afflicted by six decades of revolution, civil war, and drought; a reorganization of ecclesiastical jurisdictions and structure; finally, a spiritual revival among the laity and especially the clergy.

It is true that each of the northeastern provinces (later called states) underwent these reforms at a different pace. But measures taken in the province of Ceará and extending into the neighboring provinces of Pernambuco, Paraíba, Rio Grande do Norte, and Alagoas offer a valuable case study of how this threefold reform of the Church

⁷ Da Cunha's view that Canudos represented a conflict between two societies, one coastal, the other backland, is soundly rejected by Queiroz, *O messianismo*, 321-327. A more recent and sophisticated presentation of the multiple unit theory of Brazilian society is Jacques Lambert, *Os dois Brasileiros* (Rio de Janeiro, 1959). An important critique of the "dual" or "multiple" society thesis is Rodolfo Stavenhagen, "Seven Erroneous Theses about Latin America," *New University Thought*, IV, No. 4 (1966-1967), 25-39.

⁸ Queiroz, *O messianismo*, 321.

proceeded and what consequences it bore for the movements under discussion.

Renewed and institutionalized contact between the clergy and the people began in the northeastern backlands as early as 1853 and was primarily due to the efforts of the first "modern," northeastern-born Brazilian missionary, José Maria de Ibiapina (1806-1883). His most durable innovation was an institution called the *Casa de Caridade*, twenty-two of which were constructed throughout six states of the Brazilian Northeast between 1862 and 1883. Serving both as orphanages for abandoned girls and as schools for the daughters of local landowners and merchants, the Charity House permanently altered the stratification system of the backlands in one very significant way—until the 1920s it provided a new channel of upward mobility for rural men and women who were recruited into a quasi-religious order.⁹

For example, the women who staffed the Charity Houses acquired the new status of sister or *beata* by living as if they were members of a religious order. They took vows, wore the veil, and followed a "rule" prescribed by Ibiapina. Although lacking episcopal approbation, their new way of life and newly won status of *beata* were universally recognized and respected in the backlands. The men, although fewer in numbers and not restricted to any single house, also took vows and wore a distinctive garb; they were called *beatos*. After the death of Ibiapina in 1883, the ranks of the *beatos* and *beatas* increased as each local curate sponsored his own group of devotees. In time, no *beato* could demand popular respect unless the local curate accorded him public prestige.

The reorganization of the Northeast's ecclesiastical structure can be measured by two developments, the rapid creation of new dioceses and the erection of seminaries after 1860. Secular priests from Minas Gerais and São Paulo were rapidly elevated to the newly established sees of the Northeast. Like Dom Luiz Antônio dos Santos, who in 1861 became Ceará's first bishop, they concentrated their efforts on two tasks—the refurbishing of rundown ecclesiastical properties such as churches, chapels, and cemeteries as a sign of Catholicism's outward reform; and (of more importance) the erection of seminaries for the training of a virtuous priesthood as a step towards the inward renewal of the Church. In this respect, Dom Luiz is long

⁹ The account of Ibiapina's activities is based on Celso Mariz, *Ibiapina, um apóstolo do Nordeste* (João Pessoa, Paraíba, 1942). An excellent discussion of the Charity Houses in the Cariry Valley is found in José de Figueiredo Filho, "Casa de Caridade de Crato, Fruto do Apostolado Multiforme do Pe. Ibiapina," *A Província* (Crato), III (1955), 14-25.

honored as the founder of the Seminary of Fortaleza in 1864 and in 1875 that of Crato, just eight miles from Joazeiro.¹⁰ Among the social consequences of these construction activities was the increasing involvement of the backland elites—as suppliers of the building materials—in the organization of the Church, an involvement that would have different consequences in Canudos and Joazeiro.

A “brick and mortar” Catholicism was secondary, however, to the third and last religious activity, that of clerical reform or the spiritual renewal of the northeastern clergy. This began in Ceará with the arrival of Dom Luiz and was continued by him in Bahia after his elevation to the archbishopric at Salvador in 1880.¹¹ The first graduates of the northeastern seminaries reflected the spiritual revival which the clergy underwent. They were zealous, perhaps over-zealous, men. Educated at a time when the Church of Rome was defensive and apologetic, this new Brazilian secular clergy also reflected Western European Catholicism’s unflagging hostility towards Masonry, positivism, and Protestantism—three forces which at that time appeared also to threaten the hegemony of a revivalistic Brazilian Church.¹² Furthermore, as the ranks of the native Brazilian clergy enlarged, signs of increased national consciousness became evident in their veiled criticisms against the European priests who staffed the seminaries and monopolized the mission fields of the backlands.

Only against this background of the reform of northeastern Catholicism, can the careers of Antônio Conselheiro and Father Cícero be properly understood. From 1871 until the establishment of Canudos in 1893, Antônio Conselheiro, a native of Ceará, roamed the backlands of the Brazilian Northeast. During this time he traveled through the Cariry Valley, accompanying foreign missionaries and perhaps personally encountering and assisting Father Ibiapina. While he was in

¹⁰ For data about Dom Luiz Antônio dos Santos and the reformist role of the Mineiro and Paulista clergy in the Brazilian Northeast see *Album histórico do Seminário Episcopal do Ceará* (Fortaleza, 1914). On Father Cícero’s role in the planning and construction of the Crato Seminary, see *Album do Seminário do Crato* (Rio de Janeiro, 1925), 30-32.

¹¹ On Dom Luiz’ tenure as Archbishop of Bahia, see Arnold Wildberger, *Os presidentes da província da Bahia* (Salvador, 1949), 684.

¹² Contrary to prevailing views, the imperial “religious question” of 1870—the imprisonment of the antimasonic bishops of Pará and Bahia by Emperor Dom Pedro II—had serious and enduring effects upon the backlands. In Ceará, for example, petitions of protest against the emperor’s actions secured 5,000 signatures. Dom Luiz sent encouraging letters to Leandro Bezerra de Menezes, an imperial deputy who championed in the national parliament the cause of the Church against the Empire. See his grandson’s work for the correspondence between Leandro and Dom Luiz: Geraldo Bezerra de Menezes, *Homens e idéias à luz da fé* (2nd ed., Rio de Janeiro, 1959), 194-209.

the valley he doubtless learned of the important work of the Charity Houses.¹³

Conselheiro's principal concern during this period, as Da Cunha points out, was the reconstruction of abandoned churches, chapels, and cemeteries. Hardly a town existed which did not materially benefit from the labor gangs he directed and the financial support he readily obtained from the wealthy landowners.¹⁴ Da Cunha believed that the Counselor's permanent pilgrimage attested to his declining mental state and his incapacity to find a fixed place in society.¹⁵ But it is clear that Conselheiro was a *beato*, a wandering servant of the Church eagerly encouraged by local priests for whom his activities were undertaken and on whom his status in the backlands depended.

Conselheiro's practice of preaching from church pulpits, although authorized by local curates, rapidly brought him into conflict with the highest levels of the Bahian ecclesiastical hierarchy. His preaching, clearly a right of ordained priests and not of the laity, swiftly prompted the archbishop's reproach. In 1882 Dom Luiz Antônio dos Santos, recently elevated from the bishopric of Ceará to the archbishopric of Bahia, issued a circular letter to his parish priests prohibiting any layman from preaching.¹⁶

Interestingly enough, the preservation of clerical and hierarchical authority rather than a condemnation of Conselheiro's unorthodox religious views appears to have been the crucial issue at stake. But the archbishop's power to coerce Conselheiro declined in direct proportion to his growing utility and to the increasing admiration in which the *beato* was held by backland priests and political leaders. Finally, in 1887 Dom Luiz had to call upon Bahia's civil authorities to take measures against Conselheiro. Later that year, perhaps at the instigation of the Church, the *beato* was forced to leave Bahia. He was arrested in Recife and extradited to Ceará where unspecified charges against him were dismissed for lack of evidence.¹⁷ Conselheiro, the *beato*, had become the victim of tensions developing between an understaffed, zealous backland clergy and an organization-minded archbishop intent on duplicating in Bahia the hierarchical reorganization he had earlier achieved in Ceará.¹⁸

¹³ Montenegro, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 17-19.

¹⁴ Da Cunha, *Rebellion in the Backlands*, 133, 136-137.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 125-129.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 138-139. A more detailed account of Conselheiro's extradition to Ceará is given in Montenegro, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 25.

¹⁸ As in Ceará, Dom Luiz proceeded to "reform the archdiocesan seminary" in Salvador. For additional information see his obituary published in Guilherme

Later, however, when Conselheiro returned to Bahia, he held no grudges. He did not rise up “against the Roman Church, and he did not hurl “rebukes at her,” as da Cunha would have us believe.¹⁹ In fact, even at Canudos in 1895, two years after his life was threatened by federal troops, he even welcomed the priest-emissaries of the new Bahian archbishop, Dom Jerônimo Thomé da Silva. According to three survivors of Canudos, the Counselor never questioned the doctrines of the Church, the efficacy of her sacraments, or the spiritual authority of her virtuous priests. Not once did this *beato* ever pretend to be a priest or usurp priestly functions.²⁰ Da Cunha’s portrait of Conselheiro as the “extravagant mystic,” “indifferent paranoic,” and “crude gnostic” is a literary concoction, not historical truth.

There remains, however, the task of explaining Conselheiro’s criticisms of the Republic, which began about 1893. These, it is now clear, derived *not* from his preference for monarchy, but rather from his desire to defend the jurisdiction over marriage and burial enjoyed by the Church under the Empire and later annulled by the Republic in 1889. Although the new regime had won the unflagging fidelity of high-placed churchmen, the curates of the backlands continued to fear that the newly proclaimed Republican policy of religious toleration would crown Masonry, Protestantism, and positivism with unqualified triumph over the faith. Conselheiro could not help being influenced by these curates, and there is evidence that the latter actively encouraged the *beato* to preach on behalf of their cause. But Republican political pressures on the Bahian church hierarchy increased after 1895 and were in turn communicated to the backland curates. Under such pressure former clerical friends abandoned the Counselor and, like turncoats, accused him of betraying the regime that their bishops had learned to live with.²¹

Studart, *Datas e factos para a história do Ceará* (3 vols., Fortaleza, 1896-1924), III, 26.

¹⁹ Da Cunha, *Rebellion in the Backlands*, 134. It is true, that Conselheiro did criticize priests in 1876, 1886, and 1887. But this criticism appears to have been directed against individual curates who had taken undue advantage of him and not against the structure and doctrines of the church. On this matter, consult Montenegro, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 23-25.

²⁰ For the testimony of two survivors—Pedrao and Manuel Ciriaco—consult *ibid.*, 32. The third survivor’s memoirs are reproduced with some embellishment in Nertan Macêdo, *Memorial de Vilanova* (Rio de Janeiro, 1964). In them, Honório Vilanova, brother of Antônio, the famous merchant and guerrilla warrior of Canudos, asserts that one of the reasons he took his family to live in Canudos was that there “faith in God coexisted with simple and human mysteries,” 31. For biographical data about Antônio Vilanova, consult Azarias Sobreira, “Vilanova e Antônio Conselheiro,” *RIC*, 62 (1948), 218-220.

²¹ Montenegro, *Antônio Conselheiro*, states that Conselheiro “did not act be-

In contrast to the layman *Conselheiro*, Cícero Romão Batista, born in Crato, Ceará in 1844, was an ordained Roman Catholic priest. One of the first graduates of the Fortaleza seminary, he began his clerical career as a teacher in Crato shortly after his ordination in 1870. Two years later he was appointed by his bishop to the chaplaincy of the neighboring hamlet and municipal district of Joazeiro. There his zeal and dedication won him the popularity of both the wellborn and the humble. These qualities and his alleged religious visions have led many authors to conclude in retrospect that the religious movement of Joazeiro was inspired principally by the priest's rigid morality and mystical personality.²² These authors, however, fail to consider that Father Cícero was no less orthodox and zealous than most of his priestly colleagues who served in the Cariry Valley. During his chaplaincy in Joazeiro between 1872 and 1889, he did not deviate from the conduct expected of a priest. He was a loyal supporter of his bishop's plan to build a seminary in Crato. At the request of his superiors, he established in Joazeiro a number of modern religious associations, such as the St. Vincent de Paul Society, which linked his parishioners to member branches in other parts of the state and nation. Finally, like his zealous colleagues of the backlands, he established and directed his own community of *beatas* and *beatas*.²³

What truth is there, then, that the alleged miracle of Joazeiro was the work of a single man and his gullible mass of "fanatics"? It is true that in March 1889 Father Cícero became involved in an alleged miracle. The host he administered to a *beata* of Joazeiro was suddenly transformed into blood—thought to be the blood of Christ. However, priests *other than* Father Cícero publicized and exploited this miracle. They organized pilgrimages to Joazeiro from distant corners of the Northeast and barraged the Brazilian and foreign press with news of the "divine" occurrence.²⁴

_____ cause he was a monarchist, but because the new regime separated the Church from the State," 34. On the role of a certain Fr. Agripino who incited *Conselheiro* to preach against the Republic and on his and other priests' abandonment of *Conselheiro* after 1895, see *ibid.*, 15-16. On the clergy's opposition to republican laws regarding civil marriage, consult José Maria Bello, *A History of Modern Brazil, 1889-1964* (Stanford, 1966), 69.

²² Father Cícero's "visions" are discussed in Diniz, *Mistérios*, 10ff. The viewpoint that Cícero, as a personality, inspired the movement at Joazeiro is expressed primarily in Gomes de Araújo, "Apostalado," and "A margem," and, with minor variations, in Lourenço Filho, *Joazeiro do Padre Cícero*.

²³ The Joazeiro chapter of the St. Vincent de Paul Society was established on February 18, 1888; eight months later, a local branch of the Apostleship of Prayer was also founded. See Studart, *Datas e fatos*, II, 356.

²⁴ Mons. Francisco Monteiro, Rector of the Crato Seminary, was the first to proclaim publicly the "extraordinary event" of Joazeiro a miracle. In July

Similarly, several facts demonstrate that from the outset the movement of Joazeiro originated with and deeply engaged, not the people, but the clergy. From 1889 until 1891 twelve priests of the Carry Valley, motivated in part by zealous faith and hostility towards Masonry, positivism, and Protestantism, ardently championed the miracles of Joazeiro. They found their earliest and staunchest followers among the local Catholic landowners, merchants, and professional men and only thereafter among the lower class. In December 1891 twenty priests in the diocese of Ceará, almost twenty percent of the total number, supported the miracle. Ceará's bishop, Dom Joaquim José Vieira, who made this estimate, feared that a schism had already occurred in his flock.²⁵ Among these Brazilian-born priests were several learned theologians, educated in Europe, who were the bishop's intimate advisers and for whom the tutelage exercised by Europeans over Brazilian Catholicism was a sensitive issue.²⁶ These comments are sufficient to show that the movement at Joazeiro, later "popularized" by endless waves of pilgrims and settlers, originated and evolved within an ecclesiastical structure.

Let us now examine the economic and political contexts in which Canudos and Joazeiro developed. Both movements took place at a critical period in the economic history of the Northeast. From 1877 to 1915 four major droughts struck the region, crippling agricultural

1889, he organized the first pilgrimage from Crato to Joazeiro and in the latter part of the year published an article on this event in a São Paulo newspaper. For data relevant to this and other aspects of the "religious question of Joazeiro," consult the documents published in: Irineu Pinheiro, *Efemérides do Carriá (Fortaleza, 1963)*; Irineu Pinheiro, *O Joazeiro do Padre Cícero e a Revolução de 1914* (Rio de Janeiro, 1938); and "Documentos sobre a questão religiosa do Juazeiro," *RIC*, 75 (1961), 266-297.

The "miracle" and movement of Joazeiro are the subject of four pastoral letters issued by Dom Joaquim José Vieira, Ceará's second bishop, in 1893, 1894, 1897, and 1898; these are published in Nertan Macêdo, *O Padre e Beata* (Rio de Janeiro, 1961), 137-190.

²⁵ Letter of Dom Joaquim José Vieira to Dom J. Azevede, December 28, 1891, in *Arquivo do Bispado do Crato*, Crato, Ceará (cited hereafter as ABC).

²⁶ Francisco Ferreira Antero and Glycério da Costa Lobo—both natives of Ceará, close collaborators of Dom Joaquim, and several times candidates for the post of bishop—were hand-picked by Dom Joaquim to investigate the miracles of Joazeiro. Subsequently, the two east their lot with the cause of the dissidents of Joazeiro. In unpublished correspondence of Antero and Costa Lobo—found in ABC and Arquivo do Colégio Salesiano "Dom João Bosco," Juazeiro do Norte, Ceará (hereafter cited as ACS)—there is strong criticism made of the French Lazarist Fathers. For biographical data about two priests, consult the *Album Histórico*; Mons. José Quinderé, "História eclesíastica do Ceará," in Raimundo Girão and Martin Filho (eds.), *O Ceará* (Fortaleza, 1939), 351-367; and Hugo Victor Guimarães, *Deputados provinciais e estaduais do Ceará* (Fortaleza, 1952), 260.

production during 12 of the 38 years. However, drought alone was not the cause of regional misfortune. Only when drought is considered in relation to the concurrent rise of coffee in the south and rubber in the far north, does the true problem of the Northeast become apparent. The new boom areas drew off the region's labor force. Without cheap and abundant labor the traditional economic activities of the Northeast—cotton and cattle—were threatened with extinction.²⁷ Despite systematic efforts of state governments to maintain the region's labor supply by preventing it from migrating to the distant rubber and coffee zones of Brazil, the northeastern labor shortage remained chronic until the early 1920s.²⁸

Given this situation, the capacity of Conselheiro and Father Cícero to attract "pilgrims" to the labor-shy regions of Bahia and Ceará (where they remained as workers) was tantamount to political power. Under the republican political system of the Northeast, dominated by the *coronel-fazendeiro*, workers represented potential wealth and votes.²⁹ Both Conselheiro and Cícero, despite their controversial religious beliefs, were courted by the local political elites. Since local politics responded to state and national pressures, the two religious leaders rapidly became both pawns and potentates in national affairs.

During the seventeen years prior to the establishment of Canudos in 1893, Conselheiro was an asset to both curates and *coronéis* of the Bahian backlands. There is strong evidence that in addition to rendering services to the church he often assisted the local colonels. They appreciated the dams and roads that the *beato* constructed for them, and above all, the free labor provided by workers whom the Counselor kept well disciplined.³⁰ During this period, however, it is extremely difficult to determine what political views Conselheiro might have held and how these could have affected his relations with the local politicians.

²⁷ The above discussion of the relationship between the changing national economy and the movements of Canudos and Joazeiro is based upon Facó, *Canuaceiros*, 29-37.

²⁸ The manpower crisis is vividly reflected in the annual messages of northeastern governors to their respective provincial or state assemblies. Those of Ceará are published. The labor shortage in Bahia saw increasing efforts to attract European workers to the state. See "O Estado da Bahia—notícias para o emigrante," *Revista do Instituto Geográfico e Histórico da Bahia* (hereafter cited as RIGHBa), III, 10 (1896), 551-564.

²⁹ The best study of *coronelismo* is Victor Nunes Leal, *Coronelismo, enxada e voto: o município e o regime representativo no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, 1948). A recent study of four contemporary *coronéis* of the Northeast (based on interviews, newspaper accounts, and other historical data) is Marcos Vincius Vilaca and Roberto C. de Albuquerque, *Coronel, Coronéis* (Rio de Janeiro, 1965).

³⁰ Da Cunha, *Rebellion in the Backlands*, 136-137; 141.

It has been asserted that at Bom Conselho in 1893 the Counselor dramatically showed his political colors. By burning tax edicts in the public square, he condemned the Republic. According to da Cunha, Conselheiro not only disliked the new taxes but he also “looked upon the Republic with an evil eye and consistently preached rebellion against the new laws.”³¹ Interestingly enough, this treacherous act did not prompt an immediate reprisal by local backland politicians. Only after some delay was a thirty-man contingent of state police dispatched from Salvador to arrest Conselheiro and to disperse his followers. The police encountered the *beato* at Masseté; after a brief skirmish, Conselheiro and his partisans retreated to the distant hills of Canudos.³²

The 1893 episode at Bom Conselho raises important questions about Conselheiro’s politics. Did he oppose the Republic between 1889 and 1893 as da Cunha contends? If so, why only in 1893, three and a half years *after* the proclamation of the Republic, did the authorities take action against him? The lack of satisfactory answers³³ has too long obscured the connection between Conselheiro’s backland movement and the changing political situation in Salvador. If such links can be shown to exist, then the case for the study of “messianism” as an integral part of the national political structure may advance one step further.

Conselheiro’s tax edict bonfire at Bom Conselho closely followed a momentous split in the leadership of the one-party system which had tranquilly governed Bahia since 1889.³⁴ The monolithic Partido Republicano Federalista-Bahia (PRF-B) broke in two in May 1893, when Luiz Vianna (soon to be governor of Bahia) rejected the leadership of his traditional allies, José Gonçalves and Cícero Dantas Martins (the Baron of Geremoabo). This rupture occurred during a midyear session of the Bahian legislature, until then virtually a social

³¹ *Ibid.*, 141.

³² Even after Conselheiro retreated to Canudos, there were deputies in the Bahian legislature who defended him against police brutality or at least argued for his physical removal by nonviolent means. See Montenegro, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 36-37.

³³ Montenegro, *ibid.*, unsatisfactorily “explains” the 1893 occurrence by alleging general instability in the backlands (48), but gives no specific cause for this condition. Queiroz, *O messianismo*, is even more vague: “After a certain moment, there were clashes with the public administration . . .” (215). Da Cunha merely alludes to the recent decrees granting municipal autonomy (141), but shows no relationship between the decrees and Conselheiro’s burning of the tax edicts.

³⁴ The split in Bahia’s one-party system is amply discussed in Antônio Ferrão Moniz de Aragão, *A Bahia e os seus governadores na República* (Bahia, 1923), 97-99.

club of like-minded friends. Control of the state's *municípios* was the major issue.³⁵ As a consequence of this party split, factionalism erupted violently throughout the backlands as *Viannistas* and *Gonçalvesistas* campaigned to secure local allies.³⁶

In the region of Canudos, the traditional domain of the Baron of Geremoabo (a *Gonçalvesista*) the burning of tax decrees appeared to be a general tactic employed by the minority *Viannista* partisans.³⁷ Conselheiro's defiance of the Republic appears to be one of several partisan acts supporting Vianna. Conversely, the subsequent dispatch of police to Masseté in 1893 emerges as an attempt by Vianna's opponents, who momentarily held a majority in the assembly, to eliminate their enemy's backland ally. Even if the Counselor was totally unaware of the political significance of his action, the great landowner of the vicinity, the Baron of Geremoabo, was not.

The Masseté incident was exploited in the Bahian assembly by the *Gonçalvesistas*. It also forced Conselheiro to search for a refuge (Canudos) "where the police would never be able to find him. . ."³⁸ But even at distant Canudos Conselheiro could not escape the consequences of rapid change in Bahian politics. Nor could the Church, repeatedly accused of inspiring and supporting politically partisan "fanaticism" in the backlands, remain publicly indifferent to Canudos. To counter such charges, Archbishop Jerônimo in 1895 dispatched two Italian Capuchins to Canudos.³⁹ At first the friars were well received by the Counselor, who permitted them to minister to the growing population's spiritual needs. But when their political mission to convince the people of the Republic's legitimacy and to persuade them to disperse became apparent, the friars met with rebuff. In May 1895 the returning missionaries released a report that condemned Canudos as a "political" as well as a "religious" sect. This allowed the radical press of Rio de Janeiro to raise for the first time the spectre of "restorationist" plots and to brand Canudos as a re-doubt of monarchism.⁴⁰

³⁵ *Ibid.* In addition to the conflict over *município* control, the split also stemmed from personal rivalry between Gonçalves and Vianna over the former's candidacy for a federal senate seat. For biographical sketches of Vianna and the Baron of Geremoabo see Antônio Loureiro de Souza, *Bahianos ilustres, 1564-1925* (Salvador, 1959), 124, 152.

³⁶ Moniz de Aragão, *A Bahia*, 97-116.

³⁷ Montenegro, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 44. Tax-decree bonfires took place in 1893 in the newly established *municípios* of Itapicuru, Soure, and Amparo, as well as in Bom Conselho. The followers of Conselheiro were encouraged to assist in these demonstrations by "'persons who would later become local authorities. . . .'"

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 166-168.

⁴⁰ If the political nature of the friars' mission was not apparent from the

Meanwhile, Vianna had triumphed over his political enemies at the polls. Since 1894, his opponents had repeatedly accused him of exploiting Conselheiro's movement for his own political ends. These charges intensified when Vianna was inaugurated as governor of Bahia in May 1896.⁴¹ Five months later Vianna purposely hesitated to dispatch a small force of troops against Conselheiro despite an urgent request from backland officials. Consequently, the governor's opponents denounced him, alleging that he intended to use Conselheiro in the elections scheduled for December 1896. When Vianna finally bowed to pressure and dispatched the troops, his adversaries charged that he did not really intend to destroy Canudos. They claimed that Vianna wished only to disperse Conselheiro's followers; these in turn, could then harass local landowners who opposed the governor.⁴² News of the surprise defeat of federal troops at Uauá reached Salvador at the end of November. The capital's populace now joined Vianna's opponents in demanding Conselheiro's blood. The governor, fearful that federal officers based in Salvador had urged the destruction of Canudos as a pretense to intervene in Bahian affairs, quickly mended his political fences.⁴³ More certain now of his hold on Salvador, Vianna expeditiously sacrificed his political ambitions in the backlands. With successive dispatches of federal troops to Canudos after January 1897, the politics of messianism in Bahia were transformed into the politics of militarism in the nation. By October the Republic triumphed at Canudos.

Even more than Canudos, the Joaseiro affair reveals the interplay of the messianic movements and national structures. The Church, in an organizational sense, played an important role in integrating this movement into a larger context. This was possible because the Church was a local institution that simultaneously formed part of a state, national, and international order.

We have already seen how the movement of Joaseiro originated outset, their report condemning Canudos as a 'political' sect definitely revealed it. The report also transformed the Counselor and his followers from an ecclesiastical problem into a political issue; consult Montenegro, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 36. As to the 'radical' reaction in Rio de Janeiro, see Bello, *History*, 150-151.

⁴¹ During the course of 1894 and 1895, Conselheiro appears to have aligned himself with backland supporters of Luiz Vianna. He was viewed as a 'threat to the cattle fazendas of José Gonçalves and Cícero Dantas Martins, the Baron of Geremoabo, both political enemies . . . ' of Luís Vianna; in Montenegro, *Antônio Conselheiro*, 48.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 49.

⁴³ Inferences that federal army elements may have done more than just wish for Vianna's deposition are found in Deolindo Amorim's apologetic article, 'Luiz Vianna,' in *RIGHBa*, 73 (1946), 303-312, 310-311.

with the Cariry Valley clergy in 1889. The priests' belief that the host was divinely transformed into the blood of Christ and their desire to see the Church legitimate this miracle necessarily required them to argue their cause within the ecclesiastical bureaucracy. Thus the procedural formalities of canon law often deflected direct conflicts between the religious dissidents of Joaseiro and their bishops who denied the validity of the "miracle." Because the clergy could legally appeal their superiors' decisions to a higher authority within the Church, the actions of the local bishops often proved inconclusive.

In the light of these facts, the contention of Queiroz that Joaseiro developed in response to conditions that were proper to its own "closed" society is both factually and theoretically inaccurate.⁴⁴ Certain ecclesiastical processes linked the distant hamlet of Joaseiro with Brazil's political and ecclesiastical power structures. In 1892 Dom Joaquim Vieira, Ceará's second bishop and a staunch opponent of the miracle, partially suspended Father Cícero from orders. In retaliation, some of the cleric's supporters traveled to Rome and petitioned the Curia to declare the miracle of Joaseiro true and thereby vindicate the suspended priest. In 1894, when Rome finally condemned the miracle, Father Cícero and his friends appealed directly to the Pope to reopen the case. During the succeeding years, the dissidents of Joaseiro responded to threats of excommunication and decrees of interdict in various ways. They used existing religious associations of the laity to raise funds in order to send emissaries to church officials in Petrópolis, Rio, and Rome.⁴⁵ They also prepared articles for the religious and secular press and launched endless petitions to bishops, cardinals, and popes in order to obtain Father Cícero's reinstatement as a priest. In 1898 Father Cícero himself traveled to Rome. Though his hopes were raised for a future vindication, he failed to obtain the nullification of his suspension at that time.

The constant tension between the hierarchy and Father Cícero over both his priestly status and the increasingly "unorthodox" religious practices of Joaseiro was an important factor in determining his unwitting entry into politics. The reluctance of clergymen to continue at his side after Rome's condemnation in 1894 led Father Cícero to

⁴⁴ Queiroz, *O messianismo*, 320-321.

⁴⁵ In 1894, the Joaseiro branch of the St. Vincent de Paul Society raised funds in order to appeal Rome's condemnation of the miracles. In 1895, a new organization, the Legion of the Cross, was founded in Joaseiro for the same purpose by a devoted follower of Father Cícero, José Joaquim de Maria Lôbo. The Legion, however, met with episcopal condemnation in 1898. For relevant details, consult Dom Joaquim's pastoral letter of 1898 in Macêdo, *O Padre e a Beata*, 178-190; and Eusébio de Sousa, "A vida da 'Legião da Cruz,'" *RIC*, 29 (1915), 315-322.

seek support for his clerical reinstatement from local *coronéis* and professional men. In 1895, while preparing a defense against fresh episcopal charges, Father Cícero sent a request to all political chiefs in the Cariry Valley. These petitions asked each *coronel*, regardless of his politics, to attest in writing to Cícero's personal and priestly integrity, his devotion to the church and its doctrines, the religious fidelity of the inhabitants of Joaseiro, and Cícero's obedience to the laws of the nation. The petitions, designed to achieve an ecclesiastical objective, were also an important political contract. In return for bipartisan support from all the valley's *coronéis*, Cícero implicitly promised his political neutrality.⁴⁶

During the first decade of the twentieth century, Cícero's act of neutrality unintentionally raised the growing hamlet of Joaseiro into a key political force in the valley. Elsewhere in this region political struggles burst forth. Between 1900 and 1909 nine of the valley's municipal chiefs were violently deposed.⁴⁷ But because Joaseiro was neutral ground, it became a haven for the political rivals of the neighboring *municípios*. Families of opposing political camps fled there for protection.⁴⁸

During that decade Joaseiro prospered. Commercial houses were permanently established; new export crops, such as *manicoba* rubber, were developed; the labor force expanded and remained free from the surrounding wars of the *coronéis*. Political exiles from neighboring towns took up residence, and ambitions for Joaseiro's political autonomy developed.⁴⁹ But Father Cícero himself had no political ambitions. The governor of Ceará would have recognized him as the political chief of his *município*, but the cleric demurred. He considered Joaseiro to be a city of God and not a city of man.

What accounts, then, for the priest's active entry into politics in 1908? Some writers contend that it can be traced to the arrival in Joaseiro of Floro Bartholomeu, a politically ambitious Bahian

⁴⁶ These petitions were found in ACS; they were personally carried to Petrópolis by José Joaquim de Maria Lôbo.

⁴⁷ On depositions in the Cariry Valley, consult Pinheiro, *O Joaseiro*, 180-184. These events were not isolated; they took place during the period in which the "politics of the governors" prevailed in state governments with the public sanction of Brazil's president, Campos Salles.

⁴⁸ Joaseiro was neutral territory between 1900 and 1909 as attested to by many unpublished documents found in ACS.

⁴⁹ The only reliable published account of Joaseiro's early quest for political autonomy is Cícero Coutinho, "A independência do Joaseiro," in *Jornal do Cariry*, I, No. 1 (Juazeiro do Norte, Ceará) July 23, 1950. The account by Montenegro, *História*, 31-36 is deficient except for his generally correct claim that Father Cícero entered politics to aid his struggle against ecclesiastical superiors, 53.

physician, and Adolfo Van den Brule, a French mining engineer.⁵⁰ These two adventurers, interested in exploiting copper deposits found on property owned by Father Cícero, set out with the cleric's permission to survey the land. An armed conflict ensued between Floro and his companions and the former owner of the land. Father Cícero was held responsible for Floro's actions. Thenceforth, according to the writers, the cleric had no recourse but to engage actively in valley politics.⁵¹

In my opinion an additional factor must be considered if this episode is to be properly understood. Early in 1908 reports reached Father Cícero that Rome intended to erect a new diocese in the interior of Ceará. Crato appeared a likely choice for the seat of the new bishopric. Since 1892, Crato—240 miles from the coast, but only eight miles from Joazeiro—had been the bishop's outpost in the backlands. It was from Crato that the ecclesiastical censures and sanctions against Joazeiro had emanated. Indeed, a bishopric in Crato might forever dash Father Cícero's hope of clerical reinstatement.

Not surprisingly, therefore, Father Cícero wanted Rome to establish the new diocese in Joazeiro. It is likely that he ordered the coprelands surveyed in order to establish them as patrimony of the future "bishopric of the Cariry" with its seat in Joazeiro. In mid-1909 he even traveled to Rio and Petrópolis to speak with the apostolic nuncio about this matter.⁵² In December 1909, however, after his return to Joazeiro, the Ceará hierarchy made clear its total opposition to Cícero's plan. Ceará's coadjutor bishop visited Crato and preached in the cathedral against the "fanaticism" of Joazeiro. Any hopes that Joazeiro might become a see and that Cícero would be restored to holy orders dimmed.⁵³

Meanwhile, Floro Bartholomeu had ascended to the apex of Joazeiro's social pyramid. His skillful pen brilliantly defended the

⁵⁰ This is the viewpoint of Lourenço Filho, *Joazeiro*, and Azarias Sobreira, "O Revolucionário," *Revista do Cinqüentenário de Juazeiro do Norte* (Fortaleza, n.d.), 14-16. For biographical data about Floro Bartholomeu, see Azarias Sobreira, "Flora Bartholomeu—o caudilho bahiano," *RIC*, 64 (1950), 193-202.

⁵¹ For a detailed account of the copperland conflict, see Floro's letter in Pinheiro, *O Joazeiro*, 165-167.

⁵² A brief account of the "Bishopric of the Cariry" episode is contained in Pinheiro, *Efemérides*, 504-505.

⁵³ An account of the bishop's denunciation of the "fanaticism" of Joazeiro and the ensuing bitter conflict in which Floro defended the priest against the church hierarchy is contained in one of the most interesting books about Joazeiro: Floro Bartholomeu da Costa, *Joazeiro e o Padre Cícero (Depoimento para a História)* (Rio de Janeiro, 1923), 57. An expurgated view of the coadjutor bishop's visit to Crato is by a priest (and his travel companion), Mons. José Quinderé, *Reminiscências* (Fortaleza, 1957), 50-51.

aging and lonely priest against the attacks launched regularly from Crato. After 1910 Floro was among those who persuasively urged Cícero to work for Joazeiro's political autonomy. Only by political action, it was argued, could the priest and his city defend themselves against a hostile Church whose representative in Crato would soon don the purple. It is in the light of this ecclesiastical problem that we must understand Father Cícero's active entry into politics after 1910, the achievement of Joazeiro's political autonomy as a *vila* in 1911, and its subsequent elevation to *município* status in 1914.

Just as external ecclesiastical considerations had propelled the movement at Joazeiro into politics, the decision to campaign for Joazeiro's autonomy prompted intervention of even more potent external political forces into local affairs. The price of autonomy was to be the integration of Joazeiro into the existing political structures of the region, state, and nation. This process can be briefly described.

Ceará's Legislative Assembly had to approve *vila* status for Joazeiro. When this occurred, Crato and Barbalha, the two *municípios* contiguous to Joazeiro, would lose territory. Since the "miracle" of 1889, both towns had profited economically and politically from the "holy city's" meteoric growth. In July 1911, the state governor and chief of the dominant Partido Republicano Conservador-Ceará (PRC-C), Antônio Pinto Nogueira Accioly, successfully steered the legislation for Joazeiro's *vila* status through the state assembly (which he and his party had controlled since 1896). Accioly found it difficult, however, to placate Crato and Barbalha—both loyal PRC-C supporters—over their territorial, economic, and political losses. In addition, other *município* chiefs of the Cariry Valley were wary of this development. Joazeiro's newly won autonomy was a confirmation of the city's superior economic and demographic position as well as of Cícero's inordinate political prestige. It might lead to disturbances in the region's traditional balance of power. Accioly, therefore, eagerly sanctioned local efforts to convene a conference of the valley's seventeen *município* chiefs in October 1911. Meeting in Joazeiro (allegedly to attend the public inauguration of the new *vila*) the seventeen PRC-C supporters issued the now celebrated "Pact of the *Coronéis*."⁵⁴ This formal agreement—unique in the annals of Brazilian regional politics—committed the signers to maintain the status quo in valley politics and to strengthen the personal and political ties of the participants. Finally, in an effort both to enforce the pact and

⁵⁴ The "Pact of the *Coronéis*" is found in Macêdo, *O Padre e a Beata*, 120-123.

to guarantee the region's stake in the political spoils of state power, the seventeen *coronéis* pledged to "maintain unconditional solidarity with H. E. Doctor Antônio Pinto Nogueira Accioly, our honored chief, and as disciplined politicians to obey unconditionally his orders and determinations."

This pact also assured local and state politicians that Joaseiro (under the aegis of Father Cícero and Floro Bartholomeu) would use its growing political power in the interests of the PRC-C (whose fifteen-year "oligarchic" rule was becoming increasingly distasteful to the emergent bourgeois merchants in Ceará's coastal capital, Fortaleza). The pact also prevented the reluctant Cícero from rejecting in early January 1912 the PRC-C's nomination to the third vice-presidency of the state. In return for Joaseiro's autonomy, Accioly had sagaciously brought into his party's ranks one of the most popular vote-getters in northeastern history.

Suddenly, in mid-January 1912, Accioly was violently deposed by a coalition of Fortaleza's merchants and their sympathizers among the Brazilian military command. PRC-C partisans, both in Ceará and in their Rio exile, unhesitatingly placed their hopes to return to power on the electoral victory of Cícero after midyear 1912. Reluctantly, the prelate—now the third vice-president of Ceará—found himself cast in the role of party savior.

By 1913 the hostile acts of Ceará's new governor, Colonel Marcos Franco Rabello, convinced Father Cícero that Joaseiro's survival was now in jeopardy. In Joaseiro, Rabello's party even dared to support a faction of landowners and merchants who attempted to defy the cleric and his supporters of the PRC-C.

During December 1913 and January 1914, Cícero reluctantly acquiesced in a conspiracy designed months earlier by a triple alliance forged in Rio de Janeiro. Floro, the PRC-C exiles in Rio, and Brazil's political strongman, Senator Pinheiro Machado had made a pact to depose Rabello.⁵⁵ The key to the seditious plan lay with Cícero. He had to call to arms both the valley's *coronéis* and his own "pilgrims" if the plot were to succeed. When Rabello threatened to send his state police into Joaseiro, the cleric finally consented to the conspiracy

⁵⁵ Floro publicly took full responsibility for organizing the sedition of 1914; see Bartholomeu, *Joazeiro*, 88, fn. 2. The overthrow of both Accioly in 1912 and Franco Rabello in 1914 is separately discussed in two works by Rodolpho Theóphilo: *A libertação do Ceará* (Lisboa, 1914); and *A sedição do Joazeiro* (São Paulo, 1922). Important documents regarding the sedition are in Pinheiro, *Esfermidades*. Also consult the pioneering effort of Abelardo Montenegro, *História dos partidos políticos cearenses* (Fortaleza, 1965).

in the belief that only armed action could now save his “holy city” and the state of Ceará.⁵⁶

The seditious movement of February-March 1914 was led by Floro and had the military, financial, and political support of the federal government. Although it only partially restored the PRC-C’s power in Ceará, the subsequent rise of both Floro and Cícero into national politics confirms the increasing interplay and integration of national and local power.

The preceding accounts of Joaseiro and Canudos provide ample conceptual and factual proof that the origins and development of messianism cannot be understood except as an integral part of both Brazilian national history and emerging national structures which began to operate effectively prior to 1930.

⁵⁶ For Father Cícero’s own explanation of his political activities between 1910 and 1914 see his “Last Will and Testament,” written in 1924, and cited in Macédo, *O Padre e a Beata*, 113-120.