Antônio Vieira

Six Sermons. Translated and edited by Mónica Leal da Silva and Liam Matthew Brockey. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. 243. Hb, £64.

This is an important book. Mónica Leal da Silva and Liam Matthew Brockey provide a wide-ranging introduction to the life and work of the Jesuit Antônio Vieira (1608–97), whom Charles R. Boxer called “the most remarkable figure in the seventeenth-century Luso-Brazilian world” (*A Great Luso-Brazilian Figure: Padre Antônio Vieira*, London: Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Councils, 1957). No comparable book exists in English. Gregory Rabassa’s translation of Vieira—consisting of two sermons, a letter to King Alfonso VI, and five chapters of *The History of the Future*—is too brief to provide readers with an understanding of Vieira’s career. The only other texts that are available in English are the translations of selected passages from Vieira’s sermons that are included in collections of primary sources edited by Lewis Hanke (*History of Latin American Civilization: Sources and Interpretations*, 2 vols., Boston: Little, Brown, 1973); by Robert M. Conrad (*Children of God’s Fire: A Documentary History of Black Slavery in Brazil*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); and by Kenneth Mills, William Taylor, and Sandra Lauderdale Graham (*Colonial Latin America: A Documentary History*, Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2002).

Vieira had a long and varied career: He served successively as a teacher in Jesuit schools in northeastern Brazil; as a representative of the Brazilian viceroy to the Portuguese monarchy following the Restoration in 1640; as a preacher in the royal court and a diplomat in London and Amsterdam; as superior of the Jesuit missions in the Amazon; as a representative of the Society of Jesus in Rome and preacher in the court of the exiled Queen Christina of Sweden; and, at the end of his life, as Jesuit visitor in Brazil. Vieira was violently expelled from Brazil in 1661 by settlers who opposed his attempts to prevent the enslavement of the Indians. After his return to Portugal, Vieira was imprisoned for five years by the Portuguese Inquisition and found guilty of heretical propositions. Soon after his release, he received a pardon from the pope, who also granted him an exemption from the jurisdiction of the tribunal. Vieira corresponded with many of the leading statesmen of his day and was celebrated as a preacher in the courts of Europe and as a writer in Europe and America.

Da Silva and Brockey’s survey of Vieira’s life and work will immediately take its place alongside Boxer’s *A Great Luso-Brazilian Figure* as an indispensable introduction in English to the full range of Vieira’s genius. The sermons are wisely chosen and superbly translated. Leal da Silva and Brockey have fully succeeded in their attempt “to remain faithful to Vieira’s syntax and style” (xlii). To have produced a translation that flows as beautifully as theirs does

is an accomplishment for which they deserve our gratitude. The notes are excellent throughout, and more thorough than those in comparable Portuguese selections of Vieira's sermons.

Vieira was a relentless critic of the theory and practice of Portuguese imperialism in general and of the treatment of Amerindians and African slaves by the crown and settlers in particular. In a series of sermons spanning more than fifty years, Vieira argued for the freedom of the Indians and for the humane treatment of blacks.

Related to Vieira's defense of Amerindians and blacks was his defense of New Christians (people of Jewish descent). Da Silva and Brockey rightly argue that "[t]here is no overstating the bold nature" (7) of Vieira's advocacy on behalf of the New Christians. This advocacy was one result of Vieira's lifelong preoccupation with Jews and Judaism. During Vieira's sojourn in Amsterdam in 1648, he met the Dutch rabbi Menasseh ben Israel, author of *The Hope of Israel* (trans. Moses Wall, ed. Henry Méchoulan and Gérard Nahon, London: Oxford University Press, 1987). Vieira's conversations with Menasseh helped to bring to fruition the millenarian ideas that he would develop in *Hopes of Portugal* of 1659 (*Esperanças de Portugal: Quinto Império do Mundo*, in Vieira, *Obra completa*, ed. Adma Muhana, vol. 3/iv [Lisbon: Círculo de Leitores, 2013–14], 63–106), the treatise that the Inquisition used as a pretext for arresting Vieira and bringing him to trial.

Because Vieira was a controversial figure during his lifetime, his sermons were more warmly received in Italy, Spain, and Spanish America than they were in Portugal and Brazil. Sometimes, too, they sparked criticism outside Portugal and Brazil. The most notable example is the famous criticism by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz of Vieira's Maundy Thursday sermon of 1655. Sor Juana's text contributed to the tensions that led to her silencing by the church hierarchy in Mexico.

In the preface to the first edition of his sermons, Vieira lamented the proliferation of unauthorized translations of his sermons and the errors in these editions. By publishing his sermons in Portuguese, Vieira meant to make an accurate text available to his contemporaries and to posterity.

Da Silva and Brockey faced a difficult challenge in deciding which texts to translate: Vieira's collected sermons comprise sixteen volumes that are of uniformly high quality. They have chosen well. The *Sermão da Sexagésima*, for example, is an essential text for understanding not only Vieira's theory and practice of preaching—the theme for which it is most famous—but also his pastoral thought. This is a notoriously difficult text to translate. Vieira drew on the principles of *conceptismo* to attack the stylized and ineffectual preaching of his contemporaries.

Vieira preached the *Sermão da Sexagésima* in the royal chapel in Lisbon shortly after returning from the missions of Maranhão in 1655. He mocked preachers who stayed safely home in Portugal rather than undertaking the dangerous work of evangelization in the far-flung missions of the empire. He calls on his contemporaries to imitate the preachers of the primitive church.

Is today's lack of fruit from the word of God perchance due to the circumstance of the person? Is it because in the old days preachers were holy, exemplary and Apostolic Men, and today preachers are myself and others like me? This is a good reason. What defines the preacher is his life and example. [...] [A]ctions give the preacher his being. To have the name of preacher, or to be a preacher by name, is of no importance; actions, life, example, works convert the world. What do you think is the best concept that the preacher brings to the pulpit? It is the concept the listeners have of his life. In the old days, the world was converted; why is no one converted today? Because today words and thoughts are preached; in the old days, words and works were preached. Words without works are shots without bullets, they stun but they do not wound (104–5).

Like the *Sermão da Sexagésima*, the *Sermon for the Success of the Arms of Portugal*, in which Vieira challenged God for allowing Dutch heretics to conquer northeastern Brazil, is a superb example of his rhetorical style and of the emotional power of his oratory. Da Silva and Brockey's translation conveys this emotion. Vieira asks why God has handed Brazil to Dutch Protestants and warns, "the day may come when You want Spaniards and Portuguese, and do not find them. Holland will give You the Apostolic Conquerors who will carry the Standards of the Cross around the world [...]. Holland will serve You and venerate You as religiously as it does every day in Amsterdam, Middelburg, Vlissingen, and in all of the other Colonies of that cold and swampy hell" (47).

The *Sermon of St. Anthony* contains, as da Silva and Brockey note, "an unsparing critique of colonial society" (xxxii), one that Vieira would refine throughout his years in the Amazon missions. The *Sermon of the Good Thief*, preached when Vieira returned to Portugal to plead the cause of the Indians, contains a similarly unsparing attack on the corruption of the counselors of the royal court. This corruption, too, was one of Vieira's lifelong preoccupations.

To represent Vieira's views on slavery, da Silva and Brockey have translated his *Maria Rosa Mística* sermon of c.1685, preached in Bahia to the Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary, whose members were black slaves. The sermon is similar, in style and substance, to the sermon from the same series that Vieira

preached in 1633 to the same brotherhood on a sugar plantation outside Bahia. Unlike Bartolomé de las Casas, who argued for the abolition of African slavery in Spanish America, Vieira never argued for abolition in Brazil. Addressing this apparent contradiction, da Silva and Brockey note “the difficulties encountered by Vieira in reconciling his prophetic understanding with his pastoral responsibilities” (xxxvii). Vieira preached,

There is not a slave in Brazil who for me is not matter for profound meditation, and it is all the more so when I see the most miserable ones. I compare the present with the future, time with eternity, what I see with what I believe, and I cannot understand how God, who created these men [the slaves] as much in His image and likeness as all others, would predestine them for two Hells, one in this life, another in the other. But when I see them so devout and merry before the Altars of Our Lady of the Rosary, all siblings together like that Lady’s Children, then I am persuaded beyond doubt that the captivity of the first transmigration [from Africa to Brazil] is ordained by His mercy for the freedom of the second [to eternity] (165).

A sermon from the *Xavier Dormindo*, *Xavier Acordado* series provides a fitting conclusion to the book. It is a tribute to Francis Xavier, a companion of Ignatius of Loyola who, at Ignatius’s request, established the first Jesuit missions outside Europe. Vieira’s reflection on Xavier is “a reflection on relics and obedience” (xl). At the same time, it is a reflection on the global missionary enterprise of the Society of Jesus and, implicitly, on Vieira’s own contribution to that enterprise.

Da Silva and Brockey have produced a book that will be of interest and lasting value to many readers in early modern European history; in the history of the early modern Catholic church in general and of its pastoral ideals and practices in particular; in preaching and rhetoric; in the comparative history of European empires; and in African and Indian slavery in the Americas.

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