

# Brazil and Orthodoxy

by Fabio Lins

*Written in the hope of redemption, this is a study of the spirituality of a country, the child of a fallen Europe, and of the vestiges of Orthodoxy in its culture.*

According to official history, Europeans discovered what is now called Brazil in 1500. However, some historians maintain that both Portugal and Spain had previously fought over the secret of 'lands to the West' and that a 'Cold War' and espionage had taken place in the race to claim these lands first. In fact, there is hardly any evidence that Portugal had reached South America before 1492 and Columbus' arrival in America caught the Portuguese by surprise. Although Columbus' had sought the sponsorship of the Portuguese crown before approaching Spain, he was turned down. This made the Portuguese crown, with the help of the Order of Christ [1], the Knights Templar, who had found refuge in Portugal, hurry to produce their own claim to the newly-discovered lands.

Thus, in 1500, with ships bearing the cross of the Order of Christ on its sails (the Greek cross inserted into the Templar cross), the Portuguese landed on the future Brazilian lands. At first they called the land 'The Island of the True Cross'. Between 1500 and 1517, the new country had several different names, most of them related to the Cross: 'Island of the True Cross' (1500), 'New Land' (1501), 'Land of Parrots' (1501), 'Land of the True Cross' (1503), 'Land of the Holy Cross' (1503), 'Land of the Holy Cross of Brazil' (1505), 'Land of Brazil' (1507) and finally, from 1517 on, 'Brazil'.



**The Exaltation of the Holy Cross**  
Brazil's first name was 'Island of the True Cross'  
<http://www.comeandseeicons.com/festal/phf02.htm>

The origin of the name Brazil is controversial. Mainstream Brazilian historians ascribe it to the local Brazilwood trees, named after a certain shade of red that is found in them. This 'Brazil-red' is the colour of red-hot coal, which in Portuguese is 'Brasa' (connected with the English word 'braise'), which gives us the word 'Brasil'. This is contested by those [2] who think the name was inspired by an Irish legend, well-known among sailors, about the island of 'Hy-Brazil' (meaning 'the great island' in Gaelic), a mystical island that was even recorded on some maps.

The first official act of the Portuguese on the 'Island of the True Cross' was a Roman Catholic Mass. This was held by the Franciscan Friar Henrique de Coimbra at Easter, 26 April 1500, and performed with a cross cut from local wood. Thus, Brazil was claimed by the spiritual heirs of the Knights Templar and 'baptized' by a Franciscan in a Mass. Young Brazil would come to receive a mainly Jesuit education through schools and religious plays. Given all this, it would be easy to conclude that, spiritually, Brazil is entirely the product of the Vatican. This is not the case. Indian religions and soon African religions came into play. These religions still exist and are influential, although today it can be said that most Brazilians actually practise some sort of syncretism rather than a single religion [3]. There was also the presence of 'Cristãos Novos', 'new Christians'. These were Jews forced to convert. There were also some Muslim slaves from Africa, who in 1835 rose in rebellion against the newly-independent Brazilian government [4]. Dutch Protestant rule in Pernambuco, in the Northeast, lasted between 1630 and 1654 [5]. Curiously, Dutch rule in Brazil made the Jews emigrate to the United States, more specifically to New Amsterdam, later known as New York, where they began the history of Jewish immigration to the USA [6].

Brazil would long be influenced by what was happening in Europe through the Portuguese Universities. In the 19th century, when Brazil became an independent monarchy, Freemasonry played a very strong role. Later, in 1889, when the republic was proclaimed Positivism was at the centre of the intellectual

arena. It is no coincidence that the Positivist motto, 'Love as a principle and Order as a basis, Progress as an aim' figures on the present flag of the Republic of Brazil. Brazil is perhaps the only country in the world where a Positivist Church was set up [7]. The influence of Positivism can also be seen in certain religious notions and it opened the doors for the arrival of Alain Kardec's French Spiritism [8]. This developed particularly strongly among the middle-classes in the 20th century, especially through the activities of the medium Chico Xavier [9].

From the syncretism of Kardecism, Roman Catholicism, African and Indian religions, the religion of Umbanda [10] was born, as well as many other minor religions. These are clearly all possession cults, in which demons pretend to be interested in charity, but preach unChristian doctrines. Today, moreover, Brazil has been witnessing the rapid growth of Protestant churches [11], mainly Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostals, but also other denominations. The Assembly of God is the most widespread among the poor and the local-born mega-church Universal Church of God has already been imported, even to England [12], while its secular power in Brazil grows. Other denominations that have significant numbers are the Baptists, the Christian Congregation of Brazil, the Adventists, Foursquare Gospel Church, Methodists, Lutherans and Calvinists. As regards other religions, Brazil basically followed the syncretistic trend.

Orthodoxy arrived in Brazil with waves of immigrants in the early 20th century [13]. Greeks, Syrians, Lebanese and Slavs have all come to Brazil, where they have cultivated their faith; in fact, there are more Lebanese in Brazil (6 million) than in the Lebanon itself (3 million). But not even they were immune to Brazil's push for syncretism and what some anthropologists call 'cultural cannibalism' [14] and it is not uncommon to find Roman Catholic devotions even among the clergy [15]. By the early 20th century there were around 26,000 Orthodox in Brazil. According to the last census there are now 50,000, taking into account all ethnic origins as well as converts. Given that the Brazilian population was around 30 million in the early twentieth century and that it is over 180 million today, it is

clear that the proportion of Orthodox has actually decreased.

The greatest spiritual difficulty for Orthodoxy in Brazil is that this country is the perfect product of fallen Western Christianity. What produced Brazil was an already spiritually fallen Portugal. While Europe may look back to its Orthodox roots, Brazil can only look to veneration for a few Orthodox saints, which has remained in Roman Catholicism. Culturally, it is also very difficult to present the concept of hesychasm to the country of Carnival.



On the other hand, Brazilians are honest and have a real interest in God. They are thirsty for something more substantial than the 'anything goes' attitude that forms the shallow 'spirituality' of so many. Many Brazilians want to convert. How sad it is that they find no support! Brazil's openness to religion, which takes it along so many perilous paths, is also a source of hope, because militant atheism has never found strong support here, apart from within a small number of 'intellectual' cliques. Indeed, in terms of religion, in many ways Brazil resembles more the pagans of ancient times than present-day atheist Europe. As C.S. Lewis put it, it is easier to convert a pagan than an atheist, for with the former there is at least some common ground in the belief in the metaphysical, while with the atheist the very basics of spirituality are lacking. Brazilians tend to love Christ, even though they are surrounded by misconceptions and demonic snares. How relieved they feel when they see the true light!

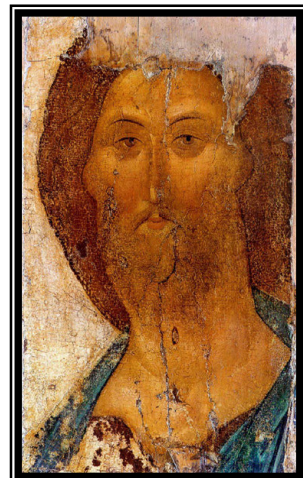
Brazil was born from the European hopes of finding Paradise. Even the local Indians wandered around in search of 'Yv Mara ey', 'the Land Without Evil' [16]. The only thing they knew was that this 'Land Without Evil' was to the East, on the other side of the ocean. When they saw the first Europeans, great expectations were raised, for they hoped that the white men would bring them the light. This could have come true, but only if the Portuguese had remained Orthodox.

Brazilians like to talk about Brazil as 'the land of the future', but they have grown more and more impatient of ever seeing this future arrive. Certainly, many have material prosperity in mind when they look forward to this future. That is where they are wrong. Brazil will only have a future worth living, if it has a spiritual future in Jesus Christ, in Orthodoxy. Though it is unlikely that we shall see Orthodoxy grow in Brazil today, it is no less unlikely than twelve men spreading the Good News to the whole world. In many ways, Brazilian culture is the child of sin. This is clearly reflected in many aspects of its culture, from the corruption of its politics to the sexualization of its greatest celebration, Carnival. It seems that Brazil's heart cannot be hard, because it can accept so many different "perspectives". But in fact it is, because in so many cases it has been hardened by its attachment to frivolity, its lack of seriousness and multiplicity in itself.

The cure for this is in repentance, but we also need real confessor missionaries who must suffer and fight against the local tendency to 'soften' everything, until everything merges with its surroundings. Brazil's best-known monument is the statue of Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro. This is a symbol of hope for the redemption of Brazilian culture. A good way of bringing Brazilians to the Church is to use as seed the Orthodox veneration of saints, something that already exists. This is why I have compiled a list of Orthodox saints who are already known to Brazilians via the vestiges of Orthodoxy in Roman Catholicism.

We must pray asking God for true missionaries, for a hierarchy that will heed this call of God, without letting traditional communities down.

Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God and Redeemer of Men, have mercy on me and save me a sinner!



**Rublev's 'Christ, the Redeemer'**

## **Hymns of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross**

### **Troparion** (Tone 1)

O Lord, save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance.  
Grant victory to Thy people over their enemies and by virtue of Thy Cross preserve Thy habitation.

### **Kontakion** (Tone 4)

As Thou wast of thine own will raised upon the cross for our sakes,  
grant mercy to those who are called by Thy Name, O Christ God;  
Make all Orthodox Christians glad by Thy power, granting them victories over their enemies,  
bestowing on them the invincible trophy, Thy weapon of peace.

### **Instead of the Trisagion**

Before Thy Cross we bow down, O Master, and Thy holy Resurrection we glorify. (*Thrice*)  
Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, both now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

And Thy holy Resurrection we glorify.

Before Thy Cross we bow down, O Master, and Thy holy Resurrection we glorify.

### **Notes:**

[1] See: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Order\\_of\\_Christ\\_%28Portugal%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Order_of_Christ_%28Portugal%29) and <http://jvarnos.com/orders/orderchrist.html>

[2] See: <http://www.irlandeses.org/0607izarra1.htm>

[3] See: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion\\_in\\_Brazil](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_Brazil) and <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/cd36-03.html>

[4] See: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Male\\_Revolt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Male_Revolt)

[5] See: <http://www.colonialvoyage.com/brazil.html>

[6] See: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_the\\_Jews\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States#American\\_Revolution\\_-\\_Sephardic\\_Jews:\\_First\\_Wave](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Jews_in_the_United_States#American_Revolution_-_Sephardic_Jews:_First_Wave)

[7] See: <http://www.igrejapositivistabrasil.org.br/english/index.html>

[8] See: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiritism> and <http://www.spiritistdoctrine.com/>  
and [http://www.seedoflight.org.au/english\\_html/spiritism.html](http://www.seedoflight.org.au/english_html/spiritism.html)

- [9] See: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chico\\_Xavier](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chico_Xavier)
- [10] See: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Umbanda> and <http://helenita89.vilabol.uol.com.br/umb.html> and <http://www.fortunecity.com/skyscraper/parallax/1548/id64.htm>
- [11] See: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protestantism\\_in\\_Brazil](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protestantism_in_Brazil)
- [12] See: <http://www.uckg.org/>
- [13] See: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration\\_to\\_Brazil](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration_to_Brazil) and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Ethnic\\_groups\\_in\\_Brazil](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Ethnic_groups_in_Brazil)
- [14] See: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manifesto\\_Antrop%C3%B3fago](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manifesto_Antrop%C3%B3fago) and [http://www.itaucultural.org.br/aplicExternas/enciclopedia\\_IC/index.cfm?fuseaction=marcos\\_texto\\_ing&cd\\_verbete=4110](http://www.itaucultural.org.br/aplicExternas/enciclopedia_IC/index.cfm?fuseaction=marcos_texto_ing&cd_verbete=4110)
- [15] See: <http://www.paroquiasantoexpedito.com.br/> and <http://www.paroquiasantoexpedito.com.br/devocao.html>
- [16] See: [http://survival-international.org/stories.php?id=32&tribe\\_id=50](http://survival-international.org/stories.php?id=32&tribe_id=50)

## Orthodox Saints Venerated in Brazil

This is a list of Orthodox saints who are already venerated and loved in Brazil. This list was compiled from the book 'O Livro de Ouro dos Santos' by Nilza Botelho Megale, which lists the most venerated saints in Brazil, those who already have the love and reverence of the Brazilian people. The aim of this list is to serve as a reference for Orthodoxy in Brazil and for future missions, which may wish to establish links between what is already known and Orthodoxy.

### **Santo Amaro**

(St Maurus)

(+ 15 January 548)

A spiritual child of St Benedict.

### **Santa Ana**

(St Ann)

The Mother of the Ever-Virgin Mary.

### **Santo André**

(St. Andrew the Apostle)

### **Santa Apolônia of Alexandria**

(St Apollonia)

(+ 249)

### **São Baltazar**

(St Balthazar)

One of the three wise men. In Brazil, some black congregations say that he was a King of the Congo.

### **Santa Bárbara**

(St Barbara of Nicomedia)

(+ 235)

### **Santo Bartolomeu**

(St Bartholomew)

Mentioned in the New Testament, the Lord said he was 'a true and honest Israelite'.

### **São Bento**

(St. Benedict)

(+ 543)

Father of Western monasticism.



**São Bras**  
(St Blaise)  
(+ 316)

**Santa Catarina de Alexandria**  
(St Catherine of Alexandria)

**Santa Cecília**  
(+ c. 223)

**São Clemente**  
(St Clement I, Pope)

**São Cosme e São Damião**  
(St Cosmas and St Damian)  
(+ 295)

**São Cristóvão**  
(St Christopher)  
(+ c. 250)

**São Dimas**  
(St Dimas)  
The Good Thief

**Santa Escolástica**  
(St Scholastica, twin sister of St. Benedict)  
(+ 543)

**Santo Estevão**  
(St Stephen)

**Santa Helena**  
(St Helen, mother of St Constantine)

**Santa Ifigênia**  
(St Iphigenia of Ethiopia)  
Baptized by St Matthew

**Santa Inês**  
(St Agnes)  
(c. 304)

**São Jerônimo**  
(St Jerome)

**São João Batista**  
(St John the Baptist)

**São João Evangelista**  
(St John the Evangelist)

**São Joaquim**  
(St Joachim)  
Father of the Mother of God.

**São Jorge**  
(St George)

**São José**  
(St Joseph)  
Protector of the Son of God.

**São Judas Tadeu**  
(St Jude Thaddeus, the Apostle)

**São Lázaro**  
(St Lazarus)

**São Longuinho**  
(St Longinus)  
The Roman soldier who pierced Christ's side while he was on the Cross and was later converted).

**São Lourenço**  
(St Lawrence)  
One of the first seven deacons

**São Lucas**  
(St Luke)

**Santa Luzia**  
(St Lucy of Syracuse)

**São Marcos**  
(St Mark)

**Santa Maria do Egito**  
(St Mary of Egypt)

**Santa Maria Madalena**  
(St Mary Magdalene)

**São Mateus**  
(St Matthew)

**São Miguel**  
(St Michael the Archangel)

**Santo Onofre**  
(St Onuphrius)

**São Paulo**  
(St Paul)

**São Pedro**  
(St Peter)

**Santa Quitéria**  
( St Quitéria, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quiteria> )

**São Sebastião**  
(St Sebastian)

**São Silvestre**  
(St Sylvester, Pope Sylvester I)

**São Tomé**  
(St Thomas the Apostle)