



Christianity and indigenous people in colonial South Carolina

Francis Le Jau (1706-1716)

Francis Le Jau was a Huguenot, a French Protestant. To escape religious persecution in Catholic France, he fled to Britain, where he became an Anglican priest. Starting in 1706, he ministered in the colony of South Carolina under the auspices of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), an Anglican missionary organization. Although Le Jau ministered primarily to white colonists, his mandate from the SPG also included trying to convert enslaved Africans and indigenous Americans. Indigenous peoples living in and around colonial South Carolina included Yamasees, Apalachees, Tuscaroras, Cherokees, Muscogeas (whom Le Jau calls Creeks), and Shawnees (whom Le Jau calls Savannah).

The following excerpts span a decade's worth of reports that Le Jau sent to his superiors in England. These excerpts show Le Jau's evolving views of the prospects for Christianizing—more precisely, Protestantizing—indigenous people in three categories: indigenous individuals held in slavery by colonists, free indigenous people living near the colonists, and indigenous nations farther away.

[December 2, 1706]

I must give the Society this opinion of mine concerning the spiritual good of the Indians, our neighbors: I daily see several of them who seem very quiet, sweet-humored, and patient, content with little, which are great dispositions to be true Christians.

[April 15, 1707]

I have been now six months here and can give some account of the place. The Indians I have conversed with do make us ashamed by their life, conversation, and sense of religion, quite different from ours: ours consists in words and appearance, theirs in reality. I hope they will soon worship Christ.

[March 13, 1708]

The character I gave of the Indians which I have seen is true; I should only add [that] they have been sometimes oppressed by men trading among them, which makes them surly. The Yamasees have sent for a clergyman to baptize their children. I would willingly go and do what I could among them if I had strength of body sufficient. God willing, as soon as I am at home, I will invite, upon some weekdays, the servants, slaves, and free Indians to come and be catechized. I perceive I shall be contradicted, but I will try and [will] send you an account of all.

[April 22, 1708]

The country is now apprehensive of another invasion from Havana, and of the Indians who came already twice upon our frontiers and did mischief. [...] I am afraid too many of the disorders [that] happened here within these twelve months are known abroad. One of the Savannah towns' inhabitants went away from us some months ago and are joined with our enemies; it is thought it

would not be safe, for the present, to send ministers among them. The king of one of the Apalachee settlements has applied himself to the governor for a minister to live among them. They are baptized and were formerly subject to the Spaniards and had a priest in every town. That king honored me with a visit and seems to be a man of great power over his people; I am told they maintained their clergy very well. I was also informed that the Yamasees had desired to have a minister to come at least and baptize their children; the report is confirmed positively by some who told me of it but denied by others. I expect an account of that nation from a friend lately gone to settle near them.

It is certain that the Indians are very cruel to one another, but is it not to be feared [that] some white men living or trading among them do foment and increase that bloody inclination in order to get slaves? I must leave that to the consideration of my betters, as well as how to remedy the evil practices of the same traders in oppressing these poor heathens. But still I must admire their sobriety, patience, content in their condition, and no care for time to come but to provide corn against winter.

[March 22, 1709]

I sent to you the spiritual account of my parish till Christmas last, or thereabouts, and hope in a little time to inform you of some further progress. The number of our communicants does increase; several adult persons are preparing for baptism; some papists hear instruction and seem well inclined; the children of this parish are well acquainted with their catechism. But as I feared the Negroes and Indian slaves should not be sent to be instructed, I must give the melancholy account that it has so happened. Yet I will not be discouraged but will take all opportunities and will use all manner of means, as God pleases, to enable me to serve those poor souls. [...] Many masters cannot be persuaded that Negroes and Indians are otherwise than beasts and use them like such. [...]

The Indian traders are expected in May next, by whom we shall be informed of the state and dispositions of our Indian friends. I know, in the main, that many of them desire to have clergymen living in their settlements; the Spaniards keep one in every town. I converse as often as my business can permit with our free Indians, a good sort of people and that would be better if they were not spoiled by our bad examples.

[August 5, 1709]

While we were of late apprehensive of an invasion, several Indian nations were encamped for some months about us. Having had opportunities to see them and inquire by interpreters, I found many grown persons among them had been baptized by Spanish priests and have Christian names, and told me [that] if they had priests, as they call them, they would use them very well. [...] I find our Indian traders are very much averse to see missionaries amongst the Indians.

[October 20, 1709]

Our free Indians, our neighbors, come to see me. I admire the sense they have of justice and their patience; they have no ambition. As for their sense of God, their notions are obscure indeed; but

when we take pains to converse with them in a jargon they are able to understand, we perceive their souls are fit materials which may be easily polished. They agree with me about the duty of praying and doing the good and eschewing the evil. The late Colonel Moore and our present governor have, in a great measure, put a stop to their perpetual murdering one another, which some of them, to this day, cannot conceive to be evil. Some of them to whom the devil has formerly appeared, as they coldly declared to myself, say that evil spirit never incites them to anything more than hatred, revenge, and murder of those that offend them.

I am still told that if anything opposes the publishing of the gospel among the Indians, it shall be the manner how our Indian trade is carried on, chiefly the fomenting of war among them for our people to get slaves.

[February 1, 1710]

I take notice that the young Indians born since we inhabited these parts and that converse with us are pretty tractable and speak good English, though their old parents bring them up in their wild fashion. I believe they, in time, will like better things. Some lads are free enough to discourse with us; I encourage them as much as I can.

[February 19, 1710]

I am afraid I did not express myself well enough when I had the honor to tell you of my desire, if I were free and able, to go among the Yamasee Indians. I never went, and [I] baptized none of them—nor any of our Indians yet, till I see further and be satisfied. But I baptized two honest Negro men who give me great consolation, seeing their behavior, and [I] have many hearers with whom I hope in God to do well.

We have several Apalachee slaves amongst us. All Indian traders tell me they were baptized; some Indians themselves have told me so. But being uncertain, may I not baptize them upon condition?

[June 13, 1710]

I discoursed lately with some of our free Indians. They ingenuously own they have forgot most of their traditions since the establishment of this colony. They keep their festivals and can tell but little of the reasons; their old men are dead. [...]

The Indian children of our neighborhood speak English; there is hope that in process of time they may be instructed. Amidst their wild ways of living, we may perceive a great deal of patience, sobriety, justice, and modesty. Their eatables are in common. Their head man, whom ignorantly we call a king, has the power over them as that of a father in his family, but he labors and fares with the rest.

[February 20, 1712]

I gave you an account, in my last, of the desolate condition of Roanoke. It was in October, or the

latter end of September, that the Tuscarora Indians living near Cape Fair cut off 137 of our people, most of them Palatines and some Switzers. I am not able to declare whether they were set on by some of the parties that have been long at variance in that place, or whether they were provoked by some great injustice and taking their land by force. [...] It is evident that our traders have promoted bloody wars this last year to get slaves, and one of them brought lately 100 of those poor souls.

It does not belong to me to say any more upon those melancholy affairs; I submit, as to the justice of those proceedings, to your wisdom. When I am asked how we are to deal with those unfortunate slaves, I content myself to exhort that they be used with Christian charity and that we render their condition as tolerable as we can. I don't know where the fault lies, but I see thirty Negroes at church for an Indian slave; and as for our free Indians, they go their own way and bring their children, like themselves, with little conversation among us but when they want something from us. I generally perceive something cloudy in their looks—an argument, I fear, of discontent. I am also informed that our Indian allies are grown haughty of late.

[May 27, 1712, to the bishop of London]

The Yamasees have a great desire to have some clergymen among them, as I have often been informed. That nation has behaved herself very well in our late expedition against the Tuscaroras, who had murdered our Roanoke neighbors and with whom peace was lately concluded. [...]

The Indian traders have always discouraged me by raising a world of difficulties when I proposed anything to them relating to the conversion of the Indians. It appears they do not care to have clergymen so near to them, who doubtless would never approve those perpetual wars they promote amongst the Indians for the only reason of making slaves to pay for their trading goods—and what slaves! poor women and children, for the men taken prisoners are burned most barbarously, I am informed. It was done so this last year, and the women and children were brought among us to be sold.

Permit to my zeal, my lord, to implore your favor and charity in behalf of the poor slaves that live amongst us. They are suffered—some forced—to work upon Sundays, having no other means to subsist. They are used very cruelly, many of them. The generality of the masters oppose that they should know anything of Christianity. I earnestly beg that those evils may, if possible, be remedied; but whether this be a proper time to desire such a reformation, I humbly submit to your lordship.

[August 30, 1712]

I have advised lately with our agent for the Indian trade concerning the best way of promoting the knowledge of Jesus Christ, our blessed Savior, amongst the Indian nations with whom he has conversed. That gentleman confirmed me in the good opinion I had of the Yamasees. He believes if two young single men having a disposition to learn the Creek language, which is understood all over the southern parts of this settlement, would trust themselves into the hands of the Yamasees, he answers they would provide for them and entertain them with great respect and

affection. Besides, our own people live within twenty or fifteen miles of those nations, who really, by my own observation, are a rational and generous people, above the rest of our neighboring Indians [...]

I had the honor to inform you of the massacre committed in the Roanoke by the Tuscaroras. Our forces destroyed many of them and made peace with the rest; those Indians have broken [the peace], which obliges us to send our late Colonel Moore's son with 50 men and 600 Indians to bring those murderers to due punishment. We think to destroy the whole nation—that is, kill the men and make the women and children slaves; this is the way of our wars upon the like provocations. Our forces will march in three weeks.

[March 19, 1716]

There remains no nation in arms against us but the Creek Indians, to whom the Yamasees, Savannah, and Apalachee Indians are joined. They can make a body of 2,000 stout men, but they must needs be very much disheartened by what happened to nineteen of their head men while our forces were in the Cherokee towns in January and February last. Our General Moore had sent about 200 men there to settle some affairs; the Creek Indians, thinking they had a fair opportunity to do us much harm, sent thirteen great men and asked leave to fall upon our men, who were scattered in several towns and houses for the conveniency of victuals. The Cherokees, though doubtful at first, resolved to declare open war against the Creek by killing those thirteen men and six more that came the following days to bear news. This was a wonderful deliverance for us—and for me in particular, who had my only son with our army in the Cherokee towns. [...]

I had charged my son to examine the temper and disposition of the Indians concerning religion. He represents them to me as a very brutish sort of people. But if it should please God that some of us should live among them and learn their language perfectly, it would in time do good, chiefly to their young ones.

Source: Frank J. Klingberg, ed., *The Carolina Chronicle of Dr. Francis Le Jau, 1706-1717* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1956), 19, 24, 37, 39, 54-55, 57-58, 61, 68-69, 73, 78-80, 109, 115-116, 121-123, 174-176, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.31822015513922>. Public domain in the United States, Google-digitized.

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The capitalizing of *Negroes* reproduces the customary (though not perfectly consistent) usage of the source publication. The word *papists*, inconsistently capitalized in the source, is consistently presented here in lowercase. Some other religious terms, consistently or frequently capitalized in the source, have been converted here to lowercase (*clergy, devil, gospel, church*) for the sake of modernization and readability.

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