

ANTONIO RUIZ DE MONTOYA (1585–1652)
THE SPIRITUAL CONQUEST (1639)

For a better understanding of the reductions . . . I shall set down a number of general remarks applicable to all the reductions and settlements.

Nature has shown herself quite miserably towards the people there in denying them metals that are elsewhere abundant . . . She has shown herself generous in disburdening them of idols and false worship, with the result that they readily embrace Catholic truth and remain solid and persevering in their allegiance to it. We purchase their good will at the price of one-pound wedges of iron. These are the implements they depend on for their living; formerly they used stone tools to cut the bushes in their fields. When presented with an iron wedge worth four to six farthings in Spain, a cacique will come out of the forests, mountains, or other hidden dwelling-places and enter the reduction with his vassals, amounting, with their dependents, to one or two hundred souls, who, once properly instructed, receive baptism. The rest aspire to fishhooks, needles, pins, and beads of glass and other materials.

They all raise food, and each man has his own plot. When past eleven years of age, boys have a plot of their own. Upon these they very cooperatively assist each other. They neither buy nor sell, for they freely and unselfishly help each other in their needs, and show great generosity to people passing through. Accordingly, there is no theft; they live in peace and without quarrels.

Throughout the year they hear Mass at daybreak and go to work from church. This holy preparation is very successful. While the sacrament of confession is received from the start, Communion is put off for a number of years, more for some and fewer for others. For while their capacity for learning matters of faith and mechanical arts is well known, the resistance among the older people is considerable.

They are highly capable in mechanical matters. There are excellent carpenters, ironworkers, tailors, weavers, and shoemakers. Though they possessed none of these skills before, the systematic effort of the Fathers has made them masters of them, not least in effective cultivation of the earth with the plow. They are remarkably attached to the music in which the Fathers instruct the caciques' children, along with reading and writing. They celebrate Mass with elaborate music for two or three choirs. They play musical instruments with great skill [which] greatly contributes to attracting pagans and making them eager to bring us into their lands to form and teach their children,

Any lapses against chastity that may be discovered are met with effective correction and exemplary punishment from the care and zeal of the caciques, fathers of families, and constables. They patrol the town at night and anyone caught doing anything suspicious is chastised.

Taken from *The Spiritual Conquest Accomplished by the Religious of the Society of Jesus in the Provinces of Paraguay, Parana, Uruguay, and Tape: A Personal Account of the Founding and Early Years of the Jesuit Paraguay Reductions*, trans. C. J. McNaspy (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1993), 129–132.