

Student Information Sheet: Catholicism and Candomblé – Church of the Bonfim

Catholicism was brought to Brazil by the Portuguese in 1500. Although enslaved Africans were immediately baptized into the Catholic Church, they brought their religious traditions with them; these African traditions developed into the African Brazilian religion, Candomblé (pronounced kahn-dom-BLAY).

The orixás (pronounced o-ree-SHAS) or gods of Candomblé link the spiritual world with the world of humans. The orixás were divinities who use divine powers to govern the natural forces such as water, air and fire. For example, Xangô is the god of lightning and thunder. Yemanjá is the goddess of the ocean and mother to all orixás.

One church that connects the practices of Roman Catholicism with those of Candomblé is the Church of Senhor do Bonfim (pronounced i-GRE-ja do sen-YOUR do Bone-FEEM). It was built in 1745 and is known for its curing and healing powers. Millions of Catholics and devotees of Candomblé come to pray for miracles and removal of diseases.



Hundreds of colorful Bonfim ribbons that are tied to wrought iron railings and fences are seen blowing in the wind at the Church of Senhor do Bonfim. They have “Lembrança do Senhor do Bonfim da Bahia” printed on them which means “Remembrance of the Savior of Bahia.” These ribbons are symbols of faith. They are usually tied around the left wrist or ankle with three knots. A wish is made for each of the three tied knots. When the Bonfim ribbon naturally breaks down and falls off, it is believed that the three wishes will come true.

Think about . . . ?

Why is the Church of Senhor do Bonfim important to Catholics and followers of Candomblé?