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the biggest slaving nation, began to deplore the institution or the trade in Africans if not of slavery itself.

The Church of Rome continued to make intermittent hostile complaints. In 1683, for example, Alderano Cardinal Cybo, the papal secretary of state, wrote to the Capuchin mission in Angola from Rome, in the name of the Sacred College, that he understood that "the pernicious and abominable abuse of selling slaves was yet continued . . . and requiring us to use our power to remedy the said abuse; which, notwithstanding we saw very little hope of accomplishing, by reason that the trade of this country lay wholly in slaves and ivory."²² All the Capuchins did was to try to stop Protestants, such as the Dutch and English, from buying slaves. But that venture was equally impossible. It is true that, in 1684, two Capuchin friars did start talking in Havana against the slave trade. The governor sent them home to Spain on the first boat, and the Council of the Indies declared that they should never be allowed to return to America. Then, at the very end of the seventeenth century, the bishop of the Cape Verde Islands, Frei Victoriano Portuense, denounced the frequent failure to baptize slaves: "Knowing the manifest injustices by which the people are made slaves in Guinea, the only excuse . . . is to say that these Gentiles are being taken out to receive the light of the church." But he added, perhaps speaking ironically: "My scruples are not so great that I totally condemn this trade, seeing that it is tolerated by so many men of letters and great theologians."²³

A curious conversation occurred in the Congo in the late seventeenth century between Father Merolla, an Italian Capuchin friar, and an English captain (the Capuchins were, in those years, the most exemplary of the religious orders, the only missionaries who worked in the fever-stricken interior of the Congo). The latter accused the former of trying to persuade the king of Congo not to sell slaves to him. Father Merolla said the king of