

A RESPONSE

to «CHURCH AND POLITICAL TRANSITION IN GOA»



by Bishop Arquimínio R. Da Costa

It is with much reluctance that I accepted the task of making some comments on the above-mentioned essay. First of all, as I am not an expert in history, it is extremely difficult for me to discuss what the author has written with so much competence about a topic in which he can be considered a specialist. In fact, he is the Director of Xavier Centre of Historical Research in Goa and has already published other works on matters relating to the history of his homeland. Another reason for my reluctance was the fact that, being a Portuguese, I find it very difficult to be totally neutral, objective and independent in dealing with matters in which my people and my country are involved. In such circumstances, it is practically impossible not to be emotionally affected.

GENERAL REMARKS

Technically speaking, I consider Father D'Sousa's essay a superior piece of work, clear, methodical and well articulated. You do not need a second reading in order to understand the author's meaning. There is perfect clarity in the way he expresses his ideas and convictions. I found the part of the essay relating to contemporary and more recent problems of the Church in Goa, generally speaking, very enlightening. The author shows a remarkable grasp of the history of his homeland and a great capacity for marshalling different and diverse facts into a unified picture reflecting historical realities. He gives us a vivid

description of many different situations, problems and challenges of the Church in contemporary Goa. By reading this essay, one learns quite a number of things about the social, economic and religious situation of that new state of India. He also suggests some lines of orientation which seem very wise and constructive and, if accepted, could possibly facilitate the solution to many of its problems.

On the other hand, I was struck by the fact that the author did not find anything positive and constructive to say about the Portuguese presence in Goa from 1510 to 1961. His analysis of the past centuries concentrates exclusively on the so-called "evils of Portuguese colonialism". One gets the impression that it would have been much better for the Church in Goa if the Portuguese had never come to India.

My own viewpoint is that in human affairs there is always a positive and a negative side. If you concentrate exclusively on the wrongs and deficiencies of human realities, your approach will be one-sided and unfair.

According to Father D'Sousa, in the traditional kind of historical analysis adopted by the Portuguese, "the whole history was reduced to the blessings of the Portuguese dispensation" That is why the author himself undertook the task of "decolonizing Goan historiography".

My question is: in his zeal to decolonize Goan historiography, has he not moved to the extreme opposite pole in which the whole history is reduced to the so-called evils of Portuguese colonialism? As an historian, the author knows perfectly well that reactions tend to be extremist and one-sided. In reacting against one situation, one runs the risk of falling into another kind of extremism. Is that not the case with the essay under consideration? When one has to write unpleasant truths about others, it would be wise to mention something good about them as well, unless there is nothing positive to be found in them at all. Is this really the case?

Another remark: when writing about past events, mainly when you measure and condemn them according to the ideas of your own time, you should take into consideration the fact that the people of past centuries belonged to a different cultural context and were, to a great extent, a product of such a cultural environment. This is why we should not judge them as people born in our own time. The author does not appear to have taken this fact into consideration. According to his logic, we should condemn St. Paul for failing to take a harder position against the great evil of his time, which was legalized slavery. Paul

seems to consider this social cancer as just a class of people among other social classes. He tries to humanize slavery but does not raise the problem of its elimination. How many centuries were necessary in order to civilize and refine ideas and feelings in order to prepare the groundwork for its abolition! If we keep this in mind, maybe we will not be so quick to condemn missionaries for establishing religious confraternities based on castes, for failing to raise the living standards of their converts, and so on. If we simply judge such attitudes according to our own ideas and condemn them without taking into consideration the mentality of those times, one may say that we are, at the very least, being unfair. The same remark could be made with regard to the so-called "aggressive methodology of the Christianity brought by the Portuguese", which is seen in the destruction of Hindu temples, in the preferential treatment given to new converts, in the abolition of many public forms of Hindu worship, in the multiplication of chapels, etc..

The author admits that his presentation of the theme is not free from bias. In order to enable the readers to understand them, he gives some information about his personal background. Maybe he could have followed the same line of thought when judging the "evils of Portuguese colonialism". In other words, he could have presented them in the perspective of the cultural background of those times! The whole picture might be different, although the facts would remain the same.

In the list of reference materials given by the author, we do not discover any Portuguese sources, although there is in the text mention of Salazar's Acto Colonial and of the letters addressed to the Goan clergy by the late Patriarch Costa Nunes.

Perhaps it would have been better if the author had consulted some Portuguese sources. It might have resulted in a more balanced presentation of the actual realities. Such an omission may have contributed to the one-sidedness of the essay, which could have been easily avoided, since the good Father has perfect mastery of the Portuguese language.

We could also mention that some of the terminology used in the essay is rather polemic, sarcastic and aggressive. Historical fidelity does not require such terminology. A milder tone of expression would be more in line with the modern trend of building bridges and bringing about better understanding among different peoples and cultures, instead of emphasizing old grievances and antagonisms.

SOME COMPARISONS BETWEEN GOA AND MACAU

Concerning both Goa and Macau, there is a transition from a colonial situation to one of integration into the mainland. However, there are also important differences. In Macau the transition is taking place by peaceful means, whereas in Goa there was the intervention of the Indian army.

The essay under consideration maintains that the said armed intervention was provoked by the wrongs of the Portuguese administration. My viewpoint is that the said armed intervention would have taken place with or without the wrongs mentioned by the author. The real motive for military intervention was Indian nationalism. The author tries to establish a link between "Operation Vijay" and the situation inside Goa. The latter would have provoked the former. In support of this position, he mentions, for instance, the case of "protesting Padres" and concludes that these priests represented the native feelings and their efforts "contributed to the building up of the current of discontent which gradually took the shape of the political freedom-struggle that culminated in 1961 with the end of the Portuguese rule in Goa". On the other hand, the author states that the participation of the Goan Christians in the struggle against the Portuguese administration "was minimal, if not totally absent". Even among the Hindus there was no "real mass movement" against Portuguese rule. In view of such rather conflicting statements, it is difficult to see a real link between the situation inside Goa and the armed intervention. Its real motive, I repeat, was Indian nationalism. I can understand this, for I know how I would feel about the presence of a hypothetical Indian colony on the coast of Portugal. In his essay the author describes other motives of political expediency which made the armed intervention urgent.

Naturally, it would have been much better if the political situation in Portugal had permitted, as in the case of Macau, a peaceful solution of the problem through negotiation.

Since India is a pluralistic democracy, the integration of Goa into the mainland did not raise the problem of religious freedom. The situation in Macau is different, as China is a totalitarian state where the Catholic Church is controlled by the so-called Patriotic Association, which in turn is controlled by the Government.

On the other hand, according to the Joint Declaration signed in Beijing by the representatives of China and Portugal on 13th April,

1987, the religious organizations in Macau will be allowed to carry on their activities as before, including those in the fields of education and social welfare. Regarding our relationship with the Pope, there is no specific provision but there are some norms which regulate the relationship between the believers and religious organizations in Macau on the one hand, and the believers and religious organizations in foreign countries on the other. It is stated that those organizations will have the right to communicate with similar organizations all over the world. This vague norm seems to include our relationship with the Pope. At least such a relationship is not positively excluded. Regarding our relationship with the religious organizations in China, there is a specific norm stating that such a relationship must be regulated by the principle of non-mutual interference, non-mutual subordination and mutual respect. This seems to forestall any design the Patriotic Association might have to interfere in the affairs of the Catholic Church in Macau. By the way, I was told in Beijing that those responsible for religious matters in China would have no jurisdiction over the religious organizations of Macau. The reason, according to them, is the fact that Macau will be a special administrative zone, with its own legislative assembly, its own local laws within the framework of the well-known formula: One Country, Two Systems.

Before 1961, the Church in Goa was closely associated with the Government, as was the case with all other overseas territories under Portuguese administration. The Church enjoyed privileged status, special protection, and was subsidized by the administration.

In the case of Macau, many of those subsidies were granted for the purpose of promoting social and educational institutions administered by the Church. One must realize that in this case the Government was not doing us a favour, because through those organizations we were doing the social welfare work that the Government itself was supposed to do. In fact, it is the Government and not the Church that receives taxes from the people. Those taxes are to be used to promote the common good, which includes education and social welfare.

Moreover, if the Government had to run all our social and educational institutions, it would have to multiply its budget by 40 or 50%, or even more. Therefore, we are helping the government through our schools and welfare institutions to save millions every year which can be used for other social development programmes.

Now if the Government as a compensation, grants us some fiscal exemptions and some subsidies for the maintenance of Church activities

and personnel, this does not seem to me to be an act of favoritism but rather an act of justice. We help them much more than they help us. In spite of this, I admit that such an association between the Church and the Government, as in the case of Macau, is outmoded. It would be much better for the Church to be completely independent. In any case, the present situation based on the so-called Acordo Missionario, is about to come to an end in view of the integration of Macau into China.

The essay under consideration sees only evils in the padroado system. My viewpoint is that, in the beginning, such an institution was helpful for the propagation of the faith. It was within the framework of the padroado system that St. Francis Xavier could move from one place to another bringing the Good News to the peoples of Asia. Would he have enjoyed the same facilities in those difficult times outside that framework?



Moreover, if the Holy See had not seen anything good in that institution, she would have opposed its establishment, unless the author's meaning is that the Holy See was either deceived or forced by Portugal to issue the so-called Padroado concessions.

The author seems to cast doubt on the motives of the missionary dimension of the Portuguese overseas enterprise. If one reads the instructions given by the kings of Portugal to their representatives in Goa, one sees their genuine interest in the propagation of the faith. Political expediency? In more recent times which have been characterized by anti-clericalism, I agree. But during these first centuries of evangelization, I do not think so. The kings were sincere believers and their interest in evangelization motivated by faith.

Naturally the padroado system had also its negative side, because it made the Church appear as an instrument of a political power, although this appearance did not always correspond to the reality. And here we return to the same questions already formulated: would it have been better for the Church in Goa if the so-called padroado system had never existed? Would it have been preferable for the propagation of the faith if the Portuguese had never come to India and to the Far East? The author, most probably, will say "yes". Others will disagree.

The essay mentions the fact that, during the Portuguese administration in Goa, all its bishops were European-Portuguese, whereas there were many competent priests among the local Goan clergy, who could have been appointed to the Patriarchal See.

The situation in Macau has been the same. I agree with the author. For political reasons, competent priest among the local clergy were not appointed as bishops in their own country. In the case of Macau, such a policy has no legal grounds. In fact, according to Portuguese law (recently changed), all people born in Macau are Portuguese citizens, unless they refuse to accept this nationality. Now there have always been Chinese priests with Portuguese identity cards and Portuguese passports. According to the Acordo Missionario, they were also eligible for the episcopate. If this did not happen sooner, it was for political reasons only. The recent appointment of Macau's first Chinese bishop was long overdue.

The author writes that the protection granted by the Portuguese administration to the Church in Goa brought about an "emasculated" Christianity which, with some exceptions, did not take an active part in the struggle against the Portuguese administration. On the other hand, the good Father states that this phenomenon extended also to the Goan people of the diaspora. The latter, I suppose, living in other countries did not undergo the "emasculating" process of those living in Goa. Yet their contribution to the above-mentioned struggle "was minimal, if not totally absent". According to the author, the large majority of Goan Christians, both in Goa and abroad, kept up the game of wait-and-see till it was safe to take sides. Regarding those living in other countries, one can possibly find different explanations for their lack of enthusiasm in the struggle against the Portuguese administration. But one cannot attribute such an attitude to the "emasculating" protection granted by the Government to the Church in Goa. In fact, such a protection could not affect those living in other countries.

Apart from that, there are even today some countries (Germany, for instance), where priests receive a subsidy from the Government, as a result of special taxation. Can you conclude that such a situation has "emasculated" the Church in those countries? It is my considered opinion that another explanation should be found for the attitude of most Christians in Goa and abroad regarding their lack of enthusiasm in the struggle against the Portuguese administration. Maybe their hatred against the Portuguese was not as strong as the author maintains. As a matter of fact, I have known many Goans who do not share the same feeling about the Portuguese as the author of this essay. Naturally,

those Goans would be considered as lackeys of the Portuguese. I do not think this is a correct way to treat people who do not share our thinking. They may be as sincere in their viewpoint as we are in ours. We may disagree with them, but we don't have the right to insult them.

In Macau, as in Goa, one can say that the hierarchy has been a privileged class as a result of the Acordo Missionario. Whether such a situation has emasculated the local Church or not is open to discussion. In any event before adopting such an insulting viewpoint, one must have very strong reasons for espousing such a position.

The problem of organized struggle against the Portuguese administration in Macau which may have existed in the past (mainly during the Cultural Revolution in China) does not exist any longer, as the future course of events has already been decided through the Joint Declaration of 13th April, 1987. Regarding the abuses of Portuguese administration, the protection granted the Church in Macau has not prevented us from speaking out the truth whenever necessary. One can see this reflected in the pages of our Catholic weekly "O Clarim". Its editors have already been questioned several times by local judges for addressing some unpleasant truths. The said weekly has been suspended by the Government. Even the bishop has sometimes been placed under pressure for not preventing the same newspaper from criticizing the administration. Naturally, government pressure did not bring about any change in our attitude.

The author mentions the deficiencies of the Portuguese educational system in Goa. The same thing can be said about Macau. The administration provides free public education only to the Portuguese and to those Chinese (very few) who study in the so-called "Luso-Chinese" schools. This means that the overwhelming majority of Macau students must go to private schools maintained by the churches and other private organizations. Up to 1978, the government did not subsidize private schools. Due to my insistence, they adopted a policy of subsidizing them in a very modest scale. The difference between the salaries in Government schools and the private schools is enormous. Now they are finally going to extend the system of free education to all primary schools of the private sector.

I must stop here. Pressure of time prevents me from undertaking a more detailed criticism of this essay, which, in spite of my own personal remarks, can be considered as a real contribution to the history of the Church in Goa.