

The Catholic Church and Portugal in Africa

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Abstract : *The way Catholic Church implanted itself in Africa, and particularly in Portuguese colonial Africa, during the first half of the 20th century. The issue of the Organic Statute of Portuguese Catholic Missions in Africa. The orientation of the missionary policy and its integration in 1933 Constitution. The Foreign Missionaries in the Portuguese Missions and their impact on the criticism to Colonization. The Missionary Statute. The issue of Beira's Bishop.*

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I. Introduction

The way in which the Catholic Church was implemented in Africa in the first half of the twentieth century, particularly in the Portuguese colonies, had a profound impact on the relations between Estado Novo and the Holy See during the second half of the 20th century. Since the beginning of the Portuguese Colonial War, from 1962, a part of the Portuguese Clergy will be against the aforementioned war and against the way Portugal pursued its colonial policy towards natives. These facts had profound repercussions in the development of diplomatic relations between Portugal and UN after the end of World War II.

II. The Catholic Church politics in Africa in the first thirty years of the Twentieth Century.

From the twenties and through the thirties, in the twentieth century there was the consecration of native bishops in Africa and Asia, and what initially was punctual as indignation has accelerated in the fifties, becoming, after the Second Vatican Council, in a demand for authenticity of the Catholic experience [1].

In the successive overseas policies of the Republic and the New State, the preservation of a pluricontinental imperial space was developed, which evolved towards the conception of a «one and indivisible Portugal», as a plan for its own national identity and as a form of resistance to the processes of decolonization encouraged in the 1950s. In a large extent, this identity had established an articulation between Christianization and the expansion of the empire, based on a very strong ideological conviction of the relationship between being Catholic and national, as a social and political order.

Despite the laicizing policy of the Republic's early years, with particular emphasis on Catholic missions, there was a progressive inflection of this policy, whether pushed by the international colonial context associated to 1914-1918 conflict or by the pressure of the various Christian Churches.

It was with the Organic Statute of the Portuguese Catholic Missions of Africa and Timor (Decree 12 485 of October 13, 1926) that Catholic missions acquired juridical personality, at the same time that they were confirmed with the right for staff training subsidies and to support missionary works. Also, during the period of military dictatorship, a Missionary Statute was signed (1926), followed by missionary agreements (1928 and 1929) concerning the Eastern Patronate.

III. The 1933 Constitution

The orientation of this missionary policy was integrated into the 1933 Constitution, in recognition of these rights and support for Catholic missions and their training houses.

The insistence on the valuation of local populations, which corresponded in a certain way to the priorities established by the Holy See for Catholic missionary, did not fail to arouse reservations and suspicions on the part of political power sectors, as well as fears and discomfort among the population of resident European origin in the territory, above all by the possible intentions regarding the autonomy of the territory that such valuation could provoke to natives.

The legal framework of religious freedom defined by 1933 Constitution, if it did not favour the Protestant mission, did not prevent it. The persistence of the Protestant penetration was also verified, also favoured by the difficulties of the Catholic missions during the republican period.

For Protestant missions, valuing a religious experience Bible centred, the issue of language had its consequences hence it made the relationship between Scriptures and the religious world of the populations more difficult, transposed by orality and associated in a very profound way to their ethnic language. In the Portuguese imperial system, Protestantism was marginal, although it was consented, namely by the international conjuncture [3].

If that dynamic provoked by Catholicism was tendentiously associated with a portugualization of the populations, with Protestantism such identification was not clear, on the contrary. Even because of the persistent distrust that behind it there would be interests leading to a certain denationalization of the populations. This distrust was a constant challenge for the Protestant communities in the Portuguese Overseas, and, in the following decades, constituted very serious difficulties for the survival of some of them [3].

In the encyclical *Saeculo Exeunte Octavo*, June 13, 1940, addressed to the Portuguese Episcopate on the celebrations of the eighth centenary of the Foundation of Nationality and the third of the Restoration of its Independence, recalling the glorious past of Portugal, Pius XII addressed the most important missionary questions. and called for the commitment of Portuguese Catholics to those tasks. In the meantime, a Missionary Agreement between the Holy See and the Portuguese State, signed in the Vatican City on 7 May 1940, had been established and understood as an explanation of articles 26 to 28 of the Concordat celebrated on that same occasion [4].

IV. The Foreign Missionaries

Foreign missionaries were allowed to attend missions on the condition that they agreed to "*submit to Portuguese laws and tribunals*", thus accepting the authority of the Portuguese State, and foreign congregations having an obligation to open training houses in mainland Portugal or its adjacent islands. However, the governing authority of the dioceses or missionary districts should be exercised by the national ecclesiastics, and it was for the Government to decide on possible "*objections of a general political nature*". The Agreement also referred to aspects related to the economic support of missionary activity, establishing the granting of subsidies by the Governments of the metropolis and the respective colony: the payment of missionary personnel and their retirement pensions; in the free concession of land available to Catholic missions, for their development and new foundations; in travel allowances inside and

outside colonies. Another crucial aspect of the text was the scope of activities in the missions, with emphasis on teaching, stating that although the Portuguese language was mandatory in indigenous schools, the Catholic Church was free to use indigenous languages in teaching Catholic religion. It was also established that the Government should be annually informed of the missionary activity [4].

After one year, with the publication of the Missionary Statute (Decree 31 207, of April 5, 1941), the Government intended to establish a detailed interpretation of the Agreement. This new diploma included eighty-two articles on: autonomy and financing of missionary activity; the attribution of responsibility for teaching, particularly for indigenous people, to Catholic missionaries and auxiliaries; and the obligation of the dioceses prelates and missionary districts to submit an annual report on missionary activity, which was considered as "*sufficient justification of the subsidies received*" from the colonies or the Metropolis [4].

By committing to subsidize "Catholic action in accordance with its national and civilizing purpose", the Government implied a character of "*nationalization of missionary activity*" which would later be a constant source of friction with the Catholic Church. Inscribed in a more global framework of legal recognition of the Catholic Church by the State, the Missionary Agreement and the Statute were, however, in some way conditioned to the Portuguese colonial interests. Although this situation did not generate great objections in the 1940s, the same did not happen in the following decades.

In Mozambique, the existing prelacy gave rise to an ecclesiastical province with three dioceses: Lourenço Marques, as a metropolitan archbishopric, Beira and Nampula.

V. The Social Status of Indigenous Peoples

The ambivalence of this missionary presence triggered important friction points, especially on the social status of the natives, and on the extent of teaching in the missions. There were problems, among others, with Mons. Manuel Alves da Cunha, vicar general of the Diocese of Luanda, accused by the governor general of being involved in a political activity aimed at separating the territory of Angola from the metropolis, which forced the archbishop of Luanda, D. Moisés Alves de Pinho, to defend his collaborator. However, this latent tension towards native populations and the formation of local religious personnel, as well as the application of social doctrine to the Portuguese colonial reality, was the central nerve of the pastoral orientations and action of the first bishop of Beira, Sebastião Soares of Resende (1906-1967), a person of great prestige and missionary commitment, but marginalized and regarded with suspicion, from an early age, by the Government and by the nationalist sectors of Portuguese Catholicism.

Since the 1930s, the "Fide Propaganda" guidelines had insisted on the need for greater indigenous incorporation into the Catholic mission, in which emulation with the Protestant mission was a constant desideratum.

D. Sebastião Soares de Resende, sought, through Catholic doctrine, to alert for the error and injustice of racial discrimination which, for him, called into question the development of an integrative project [5].

In Angola, the dioceses of Sá da Bandeira (1955) and Malanje (1957) emerged, and in Mozambique, Quelimane (1954) and Porto Amélia (1957). However, this missionary dynamism is associated with the increase of members of existing national and foreign

congregations, or the coming of new religious institutes, such as the Comboni Missionaries to Mozambique, in 1954.

In the period practically until the sixties, missionary work was almost unanimously associated with the idea of colonization, a convergence between Portuguese and Christianity that saw the evangelizing mission of the Church as inseparable from Portugal's civilizing action. However, the problem of Catholic expectations about the possibility of Catholic implantation and Christianization of populations also required a progressive reformulation of the missionary paradigms.

VI. The Indigenous Clergy

On the other hand, the concern for the formation of an indigenous clergy and the formation of local churches (territorialization of the Church) favoured the emergence of elites that fed a perspective of autonomy that would lead to the problem of decolonization. Not that Catholic missionary would directly boost this sense of autonomy, but the emulation between distinct missionaries contributed to generate different levels of perception and differentiation. The processes of colonial autonomy and decolonization also accelerated the need for an indigenization of the local Churches, resulting in their growing territorialisation.

In the sixties there was a crisis of the concept of mission under the sign of portugality, due to the impact of the renewal operated by the Second Vatican Council and the internal problematization on the future of overseas territories as a result of the outbreak of independence wars. Insisting on the Church's mission, the Council opened the way to more consistent experiences of inculturation [5].

At the beginning of the conflicts in Angola, there were coercive measures in relation to several missionary sectors, especially members of the young Catholic clergy of African origin. For the central or provincial government, the activity of some of these members of the clergy was suspicious. If, on the one hand, political power valued the action of the Catholic Church, on the other hand, it feared the consequences of this influence for what it entailed of the development of indigenous elites and of stimulating their protagonism.

Hence the end of the fifties the Holy See, within the general framework of the priorities of its universal dynamics, insisted on the need of choosing a black bishop for the Portuguese colonial possessions. The ecclesiastical leaders did not see that solution as adequate because of the conjuncture of the Catholic Church in the Continent.

VII. The 1959 Constitution

The inclusion of the reference to God in the Constitution in 1959 revision, if on the one hand, corresponded to the coherence of a non-confessional State, on the other, the separation, even if canonical, also meant that the ultramarine reality, assumed as part of the national whole, weighed on such decisions, as it was implicitly recognized that this national whole contained within it an important religious plurality, not only because of the Protestant presence, but also because of the presence of Islam and Hinduism, which, in addition to Guinea and Angola, was reinforced in Mozambique with the migration of populations from Portuguese India, a situation that was accentuated by the invasion of Goa by the Indian Union.

For the Government, it was particularly important to consider the Catholic reality as a factor of cohesion, for what the Roman Catholic Church meant for the continental populations

and because it embodied the missionary management as the basis of Portugal's "civilizing design" [5].

The death of D. Sebastião Resende in 1967 again highlighted the difficulties surrounding episcopal appointments. The Holy See initially intended that the new bishop would be D. António Ribeiro, involved in the intellectual movements of the Catholic Action of the Metropolis and known for having suspended his collaboration on television in 1964, when his religious program was censored, due to having mentioned the visit of Paul VI to Bombay.

The refusal, then expressed, by the Government was accepted by the Holy See on some counterparts, and that priest was appointed Braga's auxiliary bishop, while was transferred to Beira's diocese the then auxiliary of this continental archdiocese, D. Manuel Ferreira Cabral. But the conditions of his appointment and subsequent action in the diocese, considered as contradictory to the priorities of the action previously developed by D. Sebastião Resende, caused serious friction with priests and missionaries, introducing fractures that became unavoidable, leading to the abandonment of the diocese and to his resignation in 1971. However, three new dioceses had been created in Mozambique: in 1962, Tete and Inhambane, and in 1963, Vila Cabral. Continuing the implementation effort, the Catholic Church in Mozambique gained a greater capacity to respond to local pastoral needs, taking into account the vastness of the territory and its development.

VIII. The Contestatory Clergy

One of the emblematic figures of this process was the priest Manuel Vieira Pinto, bishop of Nampula, since 1967. Born in the diocese of Porto, it had been the great promoter of the Movement for «A Better World», since the mid-fifties, maintaining significant contacts with a Catholic elite, especially urban and intellectual, strongly marked by the conciliar renewal, which granted him prestige, influence and, consequently, audience. In 1971 he was appointed Apostolic Administrator of the diocese of Beira (June 29), which was in a delicate moment due to the difficulties caused by the government and consequent departure of D. Manuel Ferreira Cabral, as well as the abandonment of the White Priests, as a sign denouncing the situation of injustice, they considered unbearable in Mozambican reality.

The situation worsened in early 1972 with the arrest of the Priests of Burgos - the Spaniards Martin and Alfonso - on 3 January, and the priests of the parish of Macúti, the Portuguese Sampaio and Fernando Mendes, on 13 January. Appointed as the new bishop for Beira's diocese, D. Altino Ribeiro de Santana, will die shortly thereafter, victim of a heart attack, at a time when public insults and strong pressure from European sectors against him were expressed, gave a guarantee to the positions of priests who maintained seditious attitudes towards Portuguese Overseas sovereignty.

In the early 1970s, the Catholic Church in Mozambique was experiencing a deep internal fracture, where diverse perceptions were expressed on the priorities of its actions, aggravated by the war environment that affected in a wide variety of ways the missionary personnel as well as various pastoral agents, such as missionary catechists, with successive expulsions or arrests by the police and political power, who eventually reached the bishop of Nampula in March 1974 [6].

In Angola, with similar problems regarding the activity of the Catholic Church, the situation took place differently.

The progressive Catholic involvement in the contestation of the Colonial War was also boosted by the pastoral dynamics of the Pontificate of Paul VI, especially with the World Day of Peace (1968).

The audience granted by the Pope to the leading leaders of the pro-independence movements of the overseas territories in 1970 was a defining moment in this process.

These facts created, between the Catholic Church and the Portuguese Government, an environment of distrust and of unsettling tension since the republican period.

For all Christian Churches, one of the greatest difficulties that war laid had to do with the situation of catechists due to military recruitment, or because many of them were suspected of activities considered subversive, falling under the purview of the authorities, in particular the political police.

IX. Conclusion

The way the Holy See implemented the Missionaries in Africa in the first half of the 20th century, specifically in the Portuguese Colonies, had a profound impact on the position that a large part of the Clergy adopted in relation to the Portuguese Colonial War and in relation to the Status of the Indigenate. The influence of the Foreign Missionaries in the Portuguese Colonies influenced the rest of the Portuguese Clergy on human rights issues and the segregationist policies of the authoritarian agents of the Portuguese Dictatorship. The case of Beira's and Nampula's Bishops are examples of this. Much of this Clergy, from 1962 onwards, expressed solidarity with the indigenous populations, protecting them, and defending the end of the Colonial War. Portugal, after 1946, had several setbacks at the United Nations because of this support of the Catholic Church to indigenous populations. It should be noted, however, that not all Bishops shared these purposes, such as the Bishops of Lourenço Marques, who have always been supporters of the Portuguese Dictatorship.

References

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