

Progressive Catholicism in Portugal: Considerations on Political Activism (1958-1974)

João Miguel Almeida

Aggiornamento in a Regime Suspicious of Modernity

The "Spirit" of Vatican II began to manifest itself in Portugal, much to the disquiet of the small religious, cultural and political world of the Portuguese elites, even before the start of the conciliar deliberations at the end of the 1950s.

The announcement of the Second Vatican Council engendered conflicting expectations among Portuguese Catholics. The more traditional sectors expected the Council to confirm the certainties of Catholic doctrine and strengthen its authority in a world marked by sin. The beginning of the deliberations at Vatican II, with its perspective of valuing autonomy of temporal realities and *aggiornamento*, enthused a significant part of the Catholic elite, especially its younger members. Catholicism was clearly dominant in Portugal, but Catholic culture was fragile, and some Catholic elites and many practicing Catholics regarded social developments in the countries of Western Europe beyond the Pyrenees with suspicion. The Portuguese Catholic Church did not have a university of its own until 1967, and few of its priests were trained abroad. The participation of Portuguese bishops in the proceedings of Vatican II was modest. The Portuguese bishops did not have a group of experts who supported them during the Council's works and then helped to spread its doctrinal statements. The Portuguese bishops who stood out at Vatican II occupied a marginal place in Portuguese society: D. António Ferreira Gomes, bishop of Oporto, was then in exile (1959-1969), imposed by the dictator for political reasons; D. Sebastião de Resende, was bishop of Beira in Mozambique from 1943 to 1967, not exactly a powerhouse of Portuguese Catholicism.

The very idea of the Catholic hierarchy in the Vatican to promote a discussion on theological issues was subversive in a dictatorial political regime that had censorship as one of its repressive pillars. The dictator had stated, in one of the founding speeches of the Estado Novo in 1936: "To the souls torn by doubt and negativity in this century, we try to restore the comfort of the great certainties. We do not discuss God and virtue; we do not discuss the Fatherland and its History; we do not discuss the family and its morals; we do not discuss the glory of work and its duty."¹

¹ Oliveira Salazar, *Discursos e Notas Políticas*, Vol. II, 1935-1937, Coimbra : Coimbra Editora, 1945, p. 130.

The "National Front" Between the Catholic Church and the *Estado Novo*

In the context of Western Europe, Portuguese Catholics were in the peculiar situation of living in a dictatorship with close ties to the Catholic Church, the only parallel being the situation in Spain. Even so, one must underline some differences between Portugal and Spain: Franco came to power after a military victory in a civil war; Salazar affirmed himself first as Finance minister and then as President of the Council of Ministers. He accumulated several ministerial positions which were decisive in a military dictatorship, initially with a strong secular component, during which there was a complex process of transition from a liberal regime in crisis –the First Republic (1910-1926)– to an autocratic regime (which organized the referendum on the Constitution in 1933).² The *Estado Novo*, though having a close relationship with the Catholic Church,³ a relationship which the dictator himself, Salazar, described as a "national front", formally maintained a separation between Church and State⁴ established in the Concordat of 1940.

The idea of a "national front" between the *Estado Novo* and the Catholic Church was reinforced by the personal profile of Salazar and his religious and political background. The Portuguese dictator had studied in a Catholic seminary and, during the time of his university studies in Coimbra, Salazar became a close friend of Gonçalves Cerejeira, the future Cardinal-Patriarch of Lisbon during most of the years of the *Estado Novo*. Salazar started being recognized as a Catholic leader and a man with political relevance in the First Republic because of his role in the Academic Center of Christian Democracy (CADC) of Coimbra and, after the First World War, in the Centro Católico Português (CCP), where he gained the position of its most relevant ideological thinker. Following the orientations of Pope Benedict XV, Salazar defended the *ralliement* with the Republic against those Catholics who saw the restoration of the monarchy as the only way to reestablish the rights and influence which the Catholic Church had formerly held. The Centro Católico Português had a few deputies in the Republican parliament from 1918 to 1926, and it tried to influence legislation in a sense favorable to the Catholic lobby. The "centristas" acted not only in the name of the Catholic Church but also in the name of a national force establishing links with non-Catholic nationalists who regarded the liberal institutions of the First Republic as part of the problem and not part of any kind of solution to the "national crisis". These links between Catholic and non-Catholic nationalists proved to be useful during the military dictatorship and the *Estado Novo*. The fact that the Portuguese left-wing Catholics broke with the "national front" propelled the former into a position of great prominence.⁵

² Rita Almeida de Carvalho, *A Concordata de Salazar*, Lisbon: Temas&Debates/Círculo de Leitores, 2013.

³ Duncan Simpson, *A Igreja Católica e o Estado Novo Salazarista*, Lisbon: Edições 70, 2014.

⁴ De Carvalho, *A Concordata...*

⁵ João Miguel Almeida, *A Oposição Católica ao Estado Novo (1958-1974)*, Lisbon: Edições Nelson de Matos, 2008.

“Progressive Catholics”

In the 1960s and 1970s, the label “progressive Catholic” was readily attached to any Catholic who took up positions critical of the current regime. Not all Catholic critics of the dictatorship would be left-wing, but the left-wing Catholics were the ones who assumed a rather salient role. Although, during the *Estado Novo* period, the Portuguese Communist Party constituted an unavoidable reference point amongst the opposition to the dictatorship due to the fact that it was the oldest party, better organized than others and with a more significant social implantation, “progressive Catholicism” cannot be reduced to the status of Communist *compagnons de route*. “Catholic progressivism” acquired public visibility in Portugal at the end of the 1950s, precisely at a time when the high moral ground of the USSR began to dissipate amongst many European intellectuals. Portuguese “Catholic progressivism” was politically quite pluralist, ranging from reformist socialists linked to Mário Soares to the heterodox Marxists fascinated by May 1968 and by the theology of liberation – and which included Far Left parties and movements. What all the politically progressive Catholics had in common was the quest for a socialist answer to the social, economic and political problems facing Portugal.

Portuguese “progressive Catholicism” did not have an exclusively political character. One may also note a Catholic progressivism of a social and religious character, and there is not a linear correlation between these two dimensions: a politically radical Catholic could be religiously orthodox, and a Catholic committed to a profound transformation of the Catholic Church could be a political moderate. But in the early 1970s progressive Catholic groups with greater public projection were engaged in a radical transformation both of the political and social order and of the Catholic Church. After the Revolution of 1974, the Portuguese “progressive Catholics” lost visibility but not influence, participating as citizens in civic and political projects across the whole left-wing political spectrum.

The decision not to raise the Catholic flag for partisan political purposes during the revolutionary period and the first years of post-1974 Portuguese democracy was taken by some of the most prominent leaders of the Catholic opposition to the *Estado Novo*. Right from the beginning, at the massive rally on 1 May 1974, Nuno Teotónio Pereira, one of the most recognizable faces of the Catholic anti-colonial movement and a leading opponent of the dictatorship, made a speech in which he argued that, in the revolutionary context and in a context of a radical break with a dictatorship associated to the Catholic Church, it ceased to make sense to speak of “progressive Catholics”.

The “Signs of the Times” at the End of the 1950s

A group of recent graduates and young Catholic students organized inside the Catholic University Youth (JUC) in Lisbon, the capital city, turned away from Portuguese Catholic Action (ACP), considering that this structure, in aiming to shape the outlook of Portuguese lay activists, limited the latter’s cultural and political action. This group, known as the *vanguardistas*, consisted of personalities who would leave their mark on Portuguese culture, such as João Bénard da Costa, Pedro Tamen, Nuno Bragança, and others, and recognized as its leader António Alçada Baptista, who was about ten years older, had been trained by the Jesuits, and who

had exchanged his profession as a lawyer for an engagement in the publishing industry, founding in 1958 *Livraria Moraes Editora*. This group was engaged in the translation and publication of classics of Catholic thought and spirituality, as well as theologians then seen as representing the renewal or the vanguard of Catholic thought.

The poor commercial success of the books –the most successful collection, the “Christian Humanism Circle”, sold no more than four hundred copies– did not discourage them from preparing the launch of a monthly magazine, *O Tempo e o Modo*, with close intellectual ties to *Esprit* magazine (Emmanuel Mounier) and Christian personalism.⁶ The first issue of *O Tempo e o Modo* was published in 1963. The project regarded dialogue with non-believers as one of its aims, and it became a privileged place for debate on the Second Vatican Council, expressing both the initial enthusiasm with which many Catholics reacted to the event, and also the subsequent disappointment by others.

Works by a series of theologians, who stood in the tradition of the Second Vatican Council, were translated and published in *Moraes Editora*, and they were discussed in small circles of active Catholics: Marie-Dominique Chenu, Yves Congar, Edward Schillebeeckx, Hans Küng, Karl Rahner, Johann Baptist Metz.

Livraria Moraes Editora was responsible for the Portuguese edition of *Concilium*, directed by Helena Vaz da Silva, launched in January 1965. This international journal of theology based in the Netherlands counted amongst its scientific and editorial committee theologians, who were very deeply involved in the proceedings at Vatican II: Yves Congar, Hans Küng, Henri de Lubac and Karl Rahner. The Dominican friar Mateus Cardoso Peres represented Portugal on the magazine's editorial board. Between May 1965 and March 1968, the group involved in this project promoted eight *Colloquia for Subscribers of the Journal Concilium*, bringing to Portugal the theologians Edward Schillebeeckx (April 1966), Albert Dondeyne (June 1966), Leo Altting von Geusau (November 1966) and Hans Küng (April 1967).

The Post-Conciliar Crisis in Portugal

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, theological references to international exponents of the Catholic Left multiplied in Portugal and a distinct radicalization of viewpoints could be detected: the theology of liberation, or the dialogue between Christianity and Marxism, were now discussed much more frequently than personalism. Texts by Jürgen Moltmann were often reproduced and commented on within the most “progressive” Catholic sectors.

Criticism by Portuguese Catholics no longer concerned only the political situation and the silence and complicity of the Church in Portugal, or the “delay” of Portuguese Catholicism with regard to the ecclesial renewal promoted by Vatican II. Increasing numbers of Catholic activists considered that there was a contradiction, or at least a tension, between the “spirit” of religious renewal and the institutional character of the Catholic Church.

The post-conciliar crisis had a dramatic effect in Portugal, leading important sectors of Catholicism to move away from the institutional Church. The poet Ruy Belo, who had left *Opus Dei* in 1961, wrote a famous poem beginning with the words: “We, the

⁶ Nuno Estêvão Ferreira, “O Tempo e o Modo. Revista de Pensamento e Acção (1963-1967): repercussões eclesiológicas de uma cultura de diálogo”, *Lusitania Sacra*, second series, n.º 6 (1994), 129-294.

Vanquished of Catholicism". This phrase was later used as the title for the memoirs of João Bénard da Costa, the first chief editor of *O Tempo e o Modo*, the pioneering "progressive" Catholic journal, which in turn had broken with the Catholic fold in 1967. Bénard da Costa's autobiography pretends to be representative of a generation that, after an enthusiastic phase of support for an *aggiornamento* of the Catholic Church, eventually lost what the poem refers to as "the battle of faith" at the end of the sixties. Belo's poem expresses contradictory feelings: the "Vanquished of Catholicism" still believe in life and in humanity allegedly created by God, but they now feel abandoned by God and Catholic Church.⁷

Formerly Catholic activists, who openly declared themselves as "Non-Catholic Christians," engaged in political radicalization processes, and some of them committed themselves to projects outside the Church, assuming highly critical positions towards the ecclesiastical institution and reflecting on concepts such as an "underground church".

Other Catholics maintained their activism in Catholic organizations, particularly in the ACP, which in the 1960s underwent a process of membership reduction. The hierarchy took steps to adapt the ACP to the "spirit" of Vatican II. From 1966 onwards, the post of secretary general of the ACP was exercised by lay individuals, symbolically reinforcing its role as an expression of the laity within the larger body of the Church. However, these measures were not enough to prevent erosion in the ranks of ACP. The paradigm of the "Christian reconquest of society" through the unity of all Catholics, which had its heyday between the 1940s and the early 1960s,⁸ was no longer boosting the image and the membership of Catholic Action organisations. To the contrary! In the JUC, for example, which had evolved from a movement of thousands of militants to a set of semi-autonomous individual groups, different perspectives confronted one another –with regard to the relationship between Christianity and Marxism! And the primary theological inspiration for this process was provided by Johann Baptist Metz's political theology, with Metz's emphasis of the eschatological dimension constituting a particularly powerful point of attraction.⁹

The Themes of the Debates of Portuguese "Progressive Catholics"

The main topics of discussion of "progressive Catholicism" in Portugal all have in common a position which gave prominence to the "signs of the times" and demanded that faith and/or belonging to a Catholic group should imply an active intervention in the world, closely connected to the results and the expectations of Vatican II.

The Right of Catholics to Political Intervention

The issue of creating a political party, grouping together Catholics who opposed the *Estado Novo*, was much discussed both by the Catholic Left and by the secular Left. A

⁷ Jorge Revez, *Os "Vencidos do Catolicismo". Militância e atitudes críticas (1958-1974)*, Lisbon: Centro de Estudos de História Religiosa/Universidade Católica Portuguesa, 2009; João Bénard da Costa, *Nós, os vencidos do catolicismo*, Coimbra: Tenacitas, 2003.

⁸ Paulo Fernando de Oliveira Fontes, *Elites Católicas em Portugal: O Papel da Acção Católica (1940-1961)*, Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian/Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia, 2011.

⁹ José Leitão, "A JUC e a Formação da Consciência Política (1971-1974). Algumas notas", *Povos e Culturas*, special issue on « Os Católicos e o 25 de Abril » (Lisbon: CEPCEP, 2014), 169-178.

Portuguese Christian Democratic Party in the final period of the dictatorship would have allied itself to the secular left-wing opposition, which was openly socialist and communist in character.

For Salazar, the great threat emanating from the support of Catholics to Humberto Delgado, the opposition candidate for the presidential elections of 1958, was the potential danger that the ACP could be used as a basis for such a Christian Democratic party. When the bishop of Oporto defended the political freedom of Catholics in a letter directed to the dictator, broadcast by the opposition, he was forced into exile in 1959.

Both Salazar and the Cardinal-Patriarch of Lisbon, D. Manuel Gonçalves Cerejeira, criticized the "progressive Catholics" because they were regarded as objective allies of the communists. As regards the secular opposition, the appearance of "progressive Catholics" was appreciated for opposite reasons: they were regarded as precious allies in the fight against the *Estado Novo*. The secular opponents of the dictatorship tried not to repeat the mistakes of the First Republic (1910-1926) which was marked to a great extent by an anti-clerical culture. Álvaro Cunhal, the effective leader of the Portuguese Communist Party since 1943,¹⁰ proclaimed the policy of a "hand outstretched to Catholics", suggesting that they could well be "*compagnons de route*" or even activists within the PCP (Portuguese Communist Party).

Mário Soares and Salgado Zenha, who in the 1960s were figureheads of the socialist opposition, cultivated a constructive dialogue with the Catholic opposition. Soares actually favored the idea that figures from the Christian Democratic spectrum of politics, such as António Alçada Baptista, or Francisco Sousa Tavares, could form a Christian Democratic party which could be allied to the socialists during the dictatorship and which would, under conditions of democratic rule, alternate with a socialist party in power.

This idea was debated throughout the decade of the 1960s. In the legislative elections of 1961, there were two Catholic candidates standing for the first time for the opposition: António Alçada Baptista and Francisco Lino Neto. In the 1965, elections the famous "Manifesto of the 101" was published, citing the social doctrine of the Catholic Church and papal encyclicals such as *Pacem in Terris* to criticise the regime's policy. It was seen as a programmatic founding moment of a Christian Democratic party. But such a political party, it turned out, never saw the light of day during the *Estado Novo*, and this for several reasons: firstly, due to the unwillingness of any would-be militants to actively engage in such a project. Christian Democrat leaders like António Alçada Baptista or Francisco Sousa Tavares were considered as "generals without troops". The younger and indeed rather active generations in their twenties and thirties, by contrast, were more radical and considered the Christian Democrats as too conservative. For example, Manuel Serra, a national leader of the Catholic Workers Youth (JOC), a collaborator of Humberto Delgado, who participated in attempts to overthrow the regime by means of an insurrection –the so-called "revolt of the Cathedral", in 1959, and the revolt of Beja, in 1962– was an admirer of Fidel Castro. Secondly, the European Christian Democratic parties during the Cold War tended to see Salazar as a "lesser evil" and were reluctant to support the

¹⁰ Although Álvaro Cunhal was formally elected general secretary of the PCP only in 1961, the fact is that, as his most important biographer states, during the first (illegal) congress of the PCP, in 1943, Álvaro Cunhal already assumed "the effective functions of general secretary, even without the title"; see José Pacheco Pereira, *Álvaro Cunhal. Uma Biografia Política. «Duarte», o Dirigente Clandestino (1941-1949)*, Vol. II, Lisbon: Temas e Debates, 2001, p. 292.

formation of a Portuguese Christian Democratic Party. Thirdly, the Second Vatican Council itself reinforced the idea of the legitimacy of a Catholic political pluralism and in this sense devalued the importance of Christian Democratic parties.

These debates and experiences resulted in the Portuguese Left Catholics' refusal to form a confessional party and their dispersion and integration within actually-existing secular left political forces. This attitude is already clear in the legislative elections of 1969, the first such elections after the (political) death of Salazar, during the so-called "Marcellist Spring",¹¹ in which oppositional Catholics appeared on all lists of opposition parties –as communists, socialists, and monarchists. Some stood also on the slate of the regime party, the National People's Action, hoping to contribute to a peaceful transition to democracy, a wish which proved to be an illusion. And there were Catholics who denounced the electoral act as such a fraud, declaring that the dictatorship could only be overthrown by revolutionary means

The Social Question and the Labor Question. Catholics and Trade Unions

The so-called "Letter From the Bishop of Oporto" by D. António Ferreira Gomes confronted Salazar in the late 1950s with the fact that the cause of the Church was losing ground "among the souls of the people, the workers and the youth".¹²

Since the 1930s, the relations between the so-called Social Catholics and the *Estado Novo* had been marked by ambiguity and tensions which sometimes led to crises. For, on the one hand, the regime declared the Church's social doctrine to be one of its sources of inspiration, but, on the other, it disregarded one of the principles of this doctrine: freedom of association. The Constitution of 1933 established the existence of one single authorized union federation, the so-called national unions, and refused to authorize the Catholic Church to form Christian unions. But equally prominent was the ambiguous position of some Social Catholics who, on the one hand, were rather critical of the regime, and who, from the beginning, denounced Salazarist corporatism as a statist and authoritarian perversion of Catholic corporatism. However, they accepted to participate in the corporate order of the *Estado Novo*, as this would make it possible to "Christianize" corporatism.

The best-known leader of Social Catholicism was the priest Abel Varzim, who held a doctorate in Political Science from the Catholic University of Leuven, a deputy in the National Assembly between 1938 and 1942, national assistant of the JOC and the director of its newspaper *O Trabalhador* (The Worker). Father Abel Varzim was accused by the Under-Secretary of Corporations of directing a newspaper written in the "worst Marxist style" and was then dismissed by the Cardinal-Patriarch, Cerejeira, under government pressure, from all positions within the ACP in 1948. The accusation against father Abel Varzim of being a Marxist was more a fitting comment on the visceral anti-communism of the accusers than the presumed Marxist outlook of the accused.

¹¹ Salazar was withdrawn from power in 1968 after suffering a cerebral hemorrhage. He no longer remained in control of the political situation, and he eventually died in 1970. The President of Republic, Américo Tomás, nominated Marcelo Caetano as the new President of the Council, and Caetano was initially, though wrongly, invested with hopes for a softening of the dictatorship –hence the expression "Marcellist Spring".

¹² José da Felicidade Alves, *Católicos e Política de Humberto Delgado a Marcello Caetano*, Lisbon: Edição de Autor, 1968, 35.

But in the 1960s there emerged an ideological inflection of important sectors of the JOC and the Catholic Workers' League (LOC), the adult equivalent to the JOC, towards rapprochement with Marxism and collaboration with Communists. An anti-capitalist orientation was also clearly dominant in the Workers' Cultural Centre, set up around 1962-1963 by members of the JOC and LOC, with a national leadership structure and representatives operating in the more industrialized cities. The Workers' Cultural Centre (CCO) received economic support from the International Confederation of Christian Trade Unions, the Centre for Workers' Culture of France and the International Labour Office (ILO). It received documentation, equipment and teaching materials from the Institute of Social Sciences of Work at the University (Institut des Sciences Sociales du Travail) of the Université de Paris I, the French Democratic Labour Confederation (CFDT / Confédération française démocratique du travail) and the Higher Institute of Workers' Culture (Institut supérieur de culture ouvrière) in Belgium. The CCO had as its main purpose the training of Catholic trade unionists. From 1967-8 onwards, the CCO decided to open up its organisation to non-Catholics. In November 1968 a clandestine structure was created, connected to the CCO, which would become known by the acronym of "BASE" and which adopted an ideological outlook promoting workers' control and self-management.

Some trade unionists, who were Catholics or of Catholic origin, trained by the JOC, the LOC, or the CCO, founded, along with the communists, the trade union federation *Intersindical* on 1 October 1971, taking advantage of a law issued by the Marcello Caetano government that allowed the presentation of lists of candidates for the leadership of the single legal regime-authorized unions without prior government authorization.¹³

Individual and Social Rights

In a political regime with censorship as a standard operating feature, claiming the right to information was a demand which was necessarily subversive, attacking one of the repressive pillars of the *Estado Novo*. *Direito à Informação* (Right to Information) was the title of a clandestine Catholic newspaper published between 1963 and 1969, which carried censored information. It was directed by the couple Maria Natália and Nuno Teotónio Pereira, Father António Jorge Martins and Friar Bento Domingues, along with the collaboration of other Catholic activists.¹⁴

The editorial of the first edition of the underground newspaper cited the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* in the context of their defense of "the right to objective information". From the beginning, the newspaper attacked the regime's censorship and propaganda regarding the colonial war. There was an exchange of documentation with the magazines *Témoignage Chrétien* and *Informations Catholiques Internationales*. The critical attitude of some French Catholics with regard to the war in Algeria served as a political signpost. For example, a letter from a French Catholic priest to an active-duty soldier in Algeria was published, reminding this soldier that a true Christian should seek to achieve peace as soon as possible. Other topics covered by *Direito à Informação* included the "undeserved misery in the rural areas", which gave rise to an increase in emigration; the lack of freedom of association to form trade unions;

¹³ José Barreto, "Comunistas, Católicos e Sindicatos sob Salazar", *Análise Social*, 29 (1994), 287-317.

¹⁴ Joana Lopes, *Entre as Brumas da Memória. Os católicos portugueses e a ditadura*, Lisbon: Âmbar, 2007, 21-34.

the refusal to legalise the university student associations, which fed the academic crises of the 1960s; and repression by the political police (PIDE).

Information on the visit of Pope Paul VI to the Eucharistic Congress of Bombay in 1964 fell victim to government censorship, but it was reported by the Catholic underground press, giving the latter much public exposure. The Portuguese Foreign Minister considered it offensive that the Pope should visit a state which had annexed a Portuguese colony in India, Goa, in 1961. Portuguese priests were forbidden by the Portuguese Cardinal-Patriarch himself to mention the visit in their homilies, which generated several cases of open defiance and disobedience. The then-Father António Ribeiro, becoming Patriarch in 1971, was removed from Portuguese Radio and Television (RTP) for defending the pastoral character of the visit of Paul VI to India.

In addition to publishing comprehensive documentation on the subject in issues number 4 and 6 of *Direito à Informação*, some Portuguese Catholics printed in Spain, with the help of Catholics from the Spanish *Comisiones Obreras*, an underground newspaper, *Igreja Presente*, dedicated entirely to Paul VI's stay in Bombay, with a circulation of thirty thousand copies. The newspaper stressed the ecumenical position of Paul VI, who met with leaders of Muslim and Hindu communities, along with other oriental religions, in contrast to the official ideology of Portuguese colonialism which attributed to Catholic missionaries the function of civilizing the indigenous population and moving them into the orbit of Portuguese culture.

The defense of individual rights, such as the right to information and free expression was articulated by the Catholic Left together with the defense of social rights: the right to "a decent standard of living", the "right to work" and a "fair wage", the "right to emigrate". These positions were grounded in pontifical texts and they were published in texts such as the "Manifesto of the 101", issued in the 1965 elections, which had a huge public impact.

Catholic Anticolonialism

In 1961, the Portuguese colonial war in Angola began, soon spreading to Guinea (1963) and Mozambique (1964). The Portuguese Catholic hierarchy reacted to the events by recalling the supposedly providential nature of Portuguese colonisation.

The criticism and the actions of the Portuguese Catholics targeting Portuguese colonial policy, defending the principle of self-determination and the need to find a political solution to the colonial war, became a major bone of contention in the Portuguese political context. It was inconvenient for the *Estado Novo* which advocated a pluri-continental concept of the Portuguese nation and which refused even to discuss the exit of the Portuguese state from the African territories; it was inconvenient for the Portuguese episcopate, which could count on important support from the political regime in its missionary work; inconvenient even for a significant part of the political opposition to the *Estado Novo*. Republicanism was traditionally colonialist, although critical of the colonial policy of the *Estado Novo*. One of the causes that had initially given rise to Portuguese Republicanism was the reaction to the English Ultimatum of 1890, which forced the Portuguese monarchy to give the British Empire an important part of the territory formally under Portuguese sovereignty between the areas which are now Angola and Mozambique. The PCP avoided taking positions that would make it impossible to form alliances with the Republicans.

It was the Catholics and the forces to the left of the Socialists and Communists that would take more forceful positions against Portuguese colonialism. The colonial war was a factor which radicalized the Catholic Left, bringing it closer to Marxism and often leading Catholics to cooperate with or to join forces with the Far Left. There were Catholics in all organizations engaging in armed struggle against the *Estado Novo*: the League for Unity and Revolutionary Action (LUAR), Revolutionary Armed Action (ARA) linked to the PCP, and the Revolutionary Brigades (BR).

The armed struggle against the *Estado Novo* carried out by these organisations explicitly refused to countenance actions against human targets. The operations of greatest impact in the final phase of the dictatorship consisted of sabotage of military equipment.

The positions regarding the principle of self-determination of peoples or the right to meaningful development as a way to achieve peace, prominently included in the encyclicals *Pacem in Terris* and *Populorum Progressio*, were often cited by Portuguese "progressive Catholics". But the need to understand Portuguese colonialism and to embark on a political practice that clashed with the regime led them to disseminate and reflect on texts written by secular radical social scientists, prominent examples being the programmatic articles "Portugal and The End of Ultra-Colonialism" by Perry Anderson or "*La Contre-Révolution en Afrique*" by Jean Ziegler.

In Lisbon, Father Felicidade Alves preached from the pulpit against the colonial war. This had enormous impact both because of who he was and because of the place where he was preaching from. Father Felicidade Alves was seen at an early stage as a personality that would have an important position in the Portuguese Catholic Church –he was a professor of theology at the most important Portuguese seminary, the Olivais Seminary, and a priest in a large parish of Lisbon, Belém, a position which implied being chaplain of the President of the Republic. Cardinal-Patriarch Cerejeira first tried to move him aside allowing him to study in Paris in 1967, where he was preparing a doctoral thesis at the Institute of Ecumenical Studies on "The Local Church as a Basic Ecclesiastical Community". At Easter 1968, father Felicidade Alves returned to Lisbon and distributed a document among the parishioners that addressed the need to radically change the Catholic Church and, in fact, to carry out a revolution. Cardinal-Patriarch Cerejeira then decided to remove him from his position as parish priest of Belém.¹⁵

Father Felicidade Alves edited a magazine with the title *Cadernos do GEDOC* between 1970 and 1971, and the magazine went underground after publishing texts against the colonial war. In the diocese of Oporto, another priest, Mário de Oliveira, was the subject of repression because he preached against the colonial war in the parish of Macieira da Lixa and was arrested twice by the political police: the first time, he was imprisoned between July 1970 and March 1971, and then again between March 1973 and February 1974.

After 1970, a group of radical Catholics, among them the prominent individuals Nuno Teotónio Pereira and Luis Moita, organised the clandestine *Boletim Anti-Colonial* (BAC), which published several numbers and some theme-based special issues. BAC, apart from providing theoretical reflection critical of colonialism, published secret military information which led to it become the target of violent police repression.

¹⁵ Abílio Tavares Cardoso and João Salvado Ribeiro (eds.), *Testemunho Aberto. O Caso do Padre Felicidade*, Lisbon: Multinova, 1999.

In addition to their activity in clandestine publications and participation in the most diverse political parties and radical groupings, the opposition Catholics organized a specific means of civic intervention, vigils for peace, in order to discuss the taboo subject of the colonial war. The first such vigil, at the Church of São Domingos, in 1969, went almost unnoticed. But the famous vigil at the Capela do Rato on New Year's Eve 1972 had a huge impact on national and international public opinion. The initiative was organised by Catholics in collaboration with the BR, a Marxist-Leninist group which set off powerful firecrackers and distributed leaflets calling for solidarity with the participants in the vigil.

The aim of the vigil at the Capela do Rato, a chapel much frequented by a Catholic community which was committed to the *aggiornamento* of the church and which was connected to the Catholic Student Youth movement (JEC), was to bring together believers and non-believers in a session of prayer and discussion about peace, following the motto of Paul VI: "Peace is possible and depends on you". The police raided the chapel and arrested a great number of activists. It was the acid test for the new Cardinal-Patriarch D. António Ribeiro, who had succeeded Cardinal Cerejeira in 1971. D. António Ribeiro did not support the protesters of the Capela do Rato, but he condemned the police action and went to the police station demanding the release of a priest. In the National Assembly, Miller Guerra, a Catholic Member of Parliament from the so-called "liberal wing", wanted to discuss the case of Capela do Rato. As it became clear that the subject could not be discussed in parliament, he resigned from his seat. This was a decisive factor weighing in the decision of all the members of the so-called "liberal wing" in Portuguese politics, who supported a liberalisation of the regime and a peaceful transition to democracy, not to stand in the 1973 elections to the National Assembly. The illusions of a peaceful transition faded on the eve of the revolution. No-one now believed it was possible to liberalize an authoritarian regime in the context of war.

For a "Non-Constantinian" Church and for The Revolution

The visit of Paul VI to the Sanctuary of Fatima in 1967, after complex diplomatic negotiations, contributed to an increasing criticism by some Catholics of the institutional Church. The Pope emphasized the spiritual character of his presence in Fatima but could not avoid the exploitation of the event by the propaganda machine of the *Estado Novo*. For some progressive Catholics, such as João Bénard da Costa, the visit was a sign that the issue of Catholicism and politics in Portugal could not be left in the hands of the national Catholic hierarchy, which was far too compromised with the dictatorship and unable to follow the guidelines associated with the *aggiornamento*. The *Estado Novo* could still profit from the ambiguities of Vatican policies.

In the late 1960s, prominent Catholics, who began by criticizing the authoritarianism of the *Estado Novo* based on the doctrine of the Catholic Church, became increasingly critical of the oppressive structures of the Catholic Church. It was not enough to free the Church from the oppressive state. It now became necessary to release the "people of God" from a structure which was considered to be excessively dominated by the hierarchy, where the responsibilities attributed to lay people did not correspond to a real exercise of power. In 1966, in a conference organized by the Portuguese version of the international journal *Concilium*, João Bénard da Costa offered a radical revisionist understanding of the role of the hierarchy within the Catholic Church, which was published in the "progressive Catholic" media: "What is

essential in the Church are those who believe in Christ, all the Body's members. The Head exists for the Body and not the Body for the Head".¹⁶ The concept of "People of God" applied amongst other things to the ultimate consequences of faith, and it led to the demand to end all "Constantinisms". Constantine was the Roman emperor who had granted freedom of worship and protection to Christianity. In this vision put forth by Bénard da Costa, the era of Constantine would ultimately result not only in the liberation of the Church from state control, but Constantinism itself would need to be superseded by a system which would guarantee the securing of autonomy of individual consciences from Church tutelage.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, in *Cadernos do GEDOC* and various other documents, father Felicidade Alves spoke of the need to "de-clericalise" the Catholic Church. For the group which edited the *Cadernos do GEDOC*, the struggle for a fundamentally different society was inseparable from the struggle for another Catholic Church, far removed from the official Church. In that context, such a new Church could only be a "marginal Church" or an "Underground Church". The acronym GEDOC stood for "Study Group for the Exchange of Documents, Information, Experiences", and this circle of activists in effect regarded itself as a self-appointed "Christian vanguard".

"De-clericalisation" implied the rejection of a clear distinction between priests and laity established by the Catholic Church, with its separate status for priests, placing them apart from civil society. In this new vision put forth by advocates of "de-clericalisation", priests were to engage in regular paid work and to become politically active; mandatory celibacy was to be abolished; and married individuals, including women, could be ordained. The image of married priests was considered to be dramatic at the time. The position of Father Felicidade Alves against the colonial war had led Cardinal Cerejeira to remove him from his position as parish priest of Belém; when the former priest announced his wedding, the Cardinal-Patriarch went one step further and excommunicated him.

For the *Cadernos do GEDOC* group, the Catholic hierarchy was urged to adopt a lifestyle far removed from the trappings of earthly powers, and Church figures were especially enjoined not to associate with the representatives of the armed forces. The Brazilian bishop D. Hélder Câmara was cited as an example to follow.

A deep-going revolution in the Catholic Church and in society was considered inevitable, and the *Cadernos do GEDOC* discussed the role of Christians in this necessary revolution. Such a perspective was likewise prominently popularized in the manifesto of a group advocating Christian revolutionary action, dated 19 April 1969, a circle of activists who had adopted the name "The Three Hundred", but who nonetheless rejected the formation of a Christian political party.¹⁷ The theological inspiration of the editorial board of *Cadernos do GEDOC* was pluralist, but on the whole it reflected a radical intellectual environment already far removed from the personalism that had, a few years earlier, inspired *O Tempo e o Modo*. The political horizon and ultimate goal of the *Cadernos do GEDOC* circle was a socialist society which, in D. Hélder Câmara's words (which were explicitly quoted and commented on), would not be dominated by the state or by a single party and which would safeguard the individual and the community.¹⁸ The theologians that were followed

¹⁶ *O Tempo e o Modo*, n.º 9, 488.

¹⁷ *Cadernos do GEDOC*, n.º 4, 50-52.

¹⁸ *Cadernos do GEDOC*, n.º 2, 11.

closely in order to understand how such a wished-for revolution would be possible and what the specific contribution of Christians to the revolutionary process would be were Jürgen Moltmann and González Ruiz. For the GEDOC group, both authors considered that Christianity advocated a conditional nonviolence, admitting the use of violence in the service of justice, subject to constant vigilance to prevent a slippage into terrorism.

Another Sexual Morality

The debates of the so-called "progressive Catholics" on sexual morality and customs had a huge social and political impact in the 1960s. Criticism against a morality that was too rigid and hypocritical, the appreciation of the works of writers and filmmakers with an erotic and sexual aspect broke with a tradition of Catholic elites who subscribed to conservative viewpoints and accepted the role of ensuring "good customs".

Some prominent progressive intellectuals hoped that the *aggiornamento* of Vatican II would cover sexual morality, and they were quite disappointed with the publication of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* in 1968, and also with the fact that the Catholic Church continued to condemn the use of the pill and to advocate merely natural birth-control methods. From several autobiographical texts by Catholic activists who left the Catholic Church, disagreements about sexual morality emerge as one of the strongest motivating factors for their alienation from the Catholic Church, although the aforementioned publications generally retained Christian references. At stake were not only different understandings of how sexuality should be lived, but also how the Papal *magisterium* should be exercised. As forty-one Catholics wrote in a letter to the Cardinal-Patriarch in September 1968, "We have the painful doubt whether, in these circumstances, and in matters which are not connected with morals, but rather pertain to the choice of appropriate means, the Pope will not have abused his mission of Serving the People of God –thus undermining his own authority".¹⁹

It is always difficult to define boundaries between public and private life. If sex and sexuality can always be approached from a political point of view, in the late 1960s and early 1970s this became a particularly highly politicized issue in Portugal. The magazine *O Tempo e o Modo* dedicated a special feature to "Marriage" in 1968, which was seized by the political police. Marriage was advocated not as a norm, but as a lifestyle choice, and conjugal love was shown to have an erotic dimension. The special feature discussed topics such as pre-matrimonial relations, contraception, and divorce. This was enough to cause a scandal. In the 1969 election, pamphlets circulated against Catholics who had supported such views and who were candidates for the opposition, stating that such persons could not be considered honest and deserving the vote of "true Catholics".

At the University of Coimbra, the young "Catholics of the Academic Center of Christian Democracy" and the female section of the JUC founded a movement, supported by Father Manuel Reis, known as "Who We Are and What We Want". In May 1970 this movement published a book called "Radical Equality for Women", whose entire edition was seized by the political police.²⁰

¹⁹ Lopes, *Entre as Brumas*, 222.

²⁰ José Dias, *Memórias do Cidadão José Dias*, Porto: Edições Afrontamento, 2008, 89.

Final Considerations

The so-called Portuguese "progressive Catholics" broke with the "national front" which the *Estado Novo* had intended to impose on Catholics in a common opposition against communists, socialists and liberals.

In criticizing the "established disorder", "progressive Catholics" began by denouncing the alliance between the Catholic Church and the *Estado Novo*, censorship, political repression, disrespect for workers' rights and, as noted above, the "undeserved misery of the rural population", a factor which was one of the causes of a wave of emigration for people living in appalling conditions. The colonial war radicalised positions. The Portuguese Catholic Left stood out amongst the regime critics, and it became radicalised in the anti-colonial struggle.

At the end of the 1960s, criticism against the oppressive structures of the Catholic Church was added to the criticism against the oppressive structures of the state. The freedoms that had been demanded from the political regime were now demanded within the Catholic Church. "Progressive Catholics" advocated a new status for priests –the right to engage in regular paid employment, the right to freely express their opinions and to marry. They advocated especially forcefully a new and far more prominent role for the laity in the Catholic Church.

For some sectors of "progressive Catholicism", including young students, this emancipatory attitude also reached the sphere of private life, resulting in the advocacy and practice of a fundamentally different type of relations between men and women, freer and radically egalitarian. This issue acquired political significance in a traditional society in which, to mention but one example, the law did not allow women to travel out of the country without the husband's authorisation.

An active minority of young Catholics in the 1960s and 1970s played a leading role in this process of politicisation, political radicalisation and criticism of the "established disorder".

L'auteur

João Miguel Almeida est chercheur à l'Institut d'histoire contemporaine (IHC) de l'Université nouvelle de Lisbonne (IHC-UNL) et au Centre d'études d'histoire religieuse de l'Université catholique portugaise (CEHR-UCP).

Abstract

This article seeks to show that the national alliance between *Estado Novo* and the Catholic Church favored the rise to prominence of those Catholics who, in 1958, abruptly broke with the Salazarist dictatorship and felt legitimated by the theological renewal associated with the Vatican II Council. These "progressive Catholics" were not the only Catholics who opposed the *Estado Novo* but they were certainly the most visible on the Portuguese political scene and took the most radical positions during the colonial war (1961-1974). May 68 and liberation theology also left their mark on the Portuguese Catholic left, though it retained a pluralist outlook. The post-conciliar crisis was reflected in high-profile departures from the institutional Catholic Church and radical criticism of the ecclesiastical and political authorities.

Key words: Catholic Church; "Progressive" Catholics; *Estado Novo*; Vatican II, Post-Conciliar Crisis.

Résumé

Cette étude entend montrer que l'alliance nationale entre *l'Estado Novo* et l'Église catholique a favorisé l'émergence et le développement du courant catholique qui, en 1958, a rompu brutalement avec la dictature salazariste et qui s'est senti justifié, ensuite, par le renouveau théologique lié au concile Vatican II. Ces « catholiques progressistes » n'ont pas été les seuls catholiques à s'opposer à *l'Estado Novo*, mais sans doute ont-ils été les plus visibles sur la scène politique portugaise. Ce sont eux qui ont pris les positions les plus radicales pendant la guerre coloniale, entre 1961 et 1974. Mai 68 et la théologie de la libération ont marqué cette gauche catholique portugaise, qui a pourtant gardé un caractère pluraliste. La crise postconciliaire s'est manifestée à la fois par le départ de figures marquantes de l'institution catholique portugaise, et par une double critique, radicale, du pouvoir ecclésiastique et du pouvoir politique.

Mots clés: Église catholique ; catholiques "progressistes" ; *Estado Novo* ; Vatican II ; crise postconciliaire.

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