

The Role of the Church in Mozambique

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Earlier in this paper, we hinted at the rationalizations given by the Portuguese Government as to why it insists on pushing the Catholic Church into the forefront in the education of the African people. The Portuguese Government claims that it has two purposes in Africa: one is to improve the material life of the African, while the other is to encourage the Portuguese Catholic missionary to improve the Africans' spiritual and intellectual life. Whatever there is in the form of concrete programmes for putting into effect the first part of the Portuguese colonial policy was discussed, at least in part, in the outline above. The second part of the policy is being realized through the use of the Roman Catholic missions. While the Colonial Act provides for freedom of conscience and the freedom of the various religions, at the same time and in a contradictory manner it provides for a special protection and assistance to the Roman Catholic mission programme. Departing from an earlier attitude held during the first two decades immediately following the establishment of the Republic, the Portuguese Government recognized the rights and special functions of the Church, which are 'to Christianize and educate, to nationalize and civilize the native populations'.

In Mozambique this policy is governed by appropriate constitutional provisions, beginning with the Missionary Accord of 1940, which spelled out

in some detail the principles contained in the Concordat of 7 May 1940 between the Vatican and Portugal, and the Missionary Statute of 1941. In these agreements, the Portuguese Government was committed to subsidizing the Church's missionary programme, and limiting the activities of non-Catholic foreign missionaries. In the estimated population of Mozambique of 7 million, the number of people who subscribe to the Roman Catholic faith is estimated at 500,000. These are served by about 100 mission and parish churches, led by secular priests and fathers of various orders, including Franciscans, Dominicans, Benedictines, Lazarists and those of the Holy Ghost Congregation. In 1959 there were in Mozambique 240 priests and fathers. Of these, only three priests were Africans. Some of the most important activities of the Catholic Church are 'the founding and directing of schools for European and African students, elementary, secondary and professional schools and seminaries . . . as well as infirmaries and hospitals.' The whole responsibility for educating the African people has been entrusted to the Roman Catholic Church, exclusive of the government; this in spite of the fact that the overwhelming majority of the Africans are not Christians, let alone Roman Catholic. To this programme was also attached the responsibility of preparing those individuals who were to become assimilated to the Portuguese culture. The Portuguese believe that there is a better chance for an African to become a Portuguese in spirit if he is a Roman Catholic. This belief was often expressed by officials of the government, as illustrated by a statement in 1960 by Dr. Adriano Moreira, then Under-Secretary of State for Overseas Administration.

While emphasizing that political loyalty did not depend upon Christian qualification, Dr. Moreira declared that Catholic missionary activity was inseparably linked to patriotism and that the formation of Christian qualities led to the formation of Portuguese qualities. It is this attitude which led to the separation of education of the African children from that of the Europeans. This separation of the educational system of the two racial groups is all the more peculiar when one takes into consideration the fact that, elsewhere in the world, the Catholic Church insists on educating the children of its members. Yet in Mozambique, the children of the Europeans, who are more than 95% Roman Catholic, are left in the hands of the secular schools of the State. The intention of this policy is to indoctrinate the children of the majority of the native, black Mozambicans with Christianity, thereby assuring the government of a population which is loyal to Portugal.

How the Portuguese could believe this fantasy is very difficult to understand, in view of the example shown by other African states where the proportion of Christians, especially Roman Catholics, is much higher than in Mozambique. Our own neighbour, Tanganyika, has not only a higher Roman Catholic population, but it also has the first and only black African Cardinal the Catholic Church has ever had, and its first prime minister, who later became its first president, is a devout Roman Catholic. There is no evidence anywhere in Africa to support the idea, cherished by Portuguese officials, that the more Catholics they will be able to create in Mozambique, the more

Portuguese Mozambique will be.

This attitude of the Portuguese Government is so entrenched that it constantly influences policy, even where decisions involving the admission of foreign Christian missionaries, Catholic or Protestant, into the country are concerned. Since the 17th Century, foreign missionaries have been suspected of 'denationalizing the natives', and of acting as advance agents for foreign governments. When these missionaries are Protestant, the situation becomes worse; fears and resentments are multiplied. Consequently, for many years the Protestant missions in Mozambique have been hampered and quite often thwarted by a powerful combination of Catholic clergy and officials of the colonial government. From time to time public statements are made by high officials of the colonial government attacking Protestant missions, accusing them of fomenting anti-Portuguese sentiments amongst the African population. Lately accusations have been levelled against Protestant missionaries, alleging that they were responsible for the rise of nationalism in both Angola and Mozambique. This in spite of the fact that the leadership of the nationalist movements of the two countries is mixed, religiously speaking. In our own Mozambique Liberation Front, the majority of the members of the Central Committee, which directs the whole programme of the struggle, are either Roman Catholics or come from Catholic families. The man in charge of our military action programme is a practising Roman Catholic. The largest number of our students abroad, who have run away from Portuguese schools either in Mozambique or Portugal, are Roman Catholic. In the summer of 1961, when more than 100 university students from Portuguese colonies in Africa ran away from Portuguese universities to France, Switzerland and West Germany, over 80 of them declared themselves to be either Roman Catholic or to come from Catholic families . . .

In general, the Portuguese Catholic hierarchy supports the programme of the Salazar regime both at home and overseas. Most Portuguese Catholics are Portuguese first and Catholics second. To many of them, being Portuguese and being Catholic are one and the same thing. Consequently, we know of no instance during the last 40 years when the Roman Catholic Church of Portugal felt compelled to protest officially against the many excesses of the Portuguese Government's colonialist actions against the African people. On the contrary, the highest officials of the Church have tended to come out in support of the status quo.

The only exception to this rule has been the position of one leader of the Catholic Church in Mozambique, the Bishop of Beira, Monseigneur Sebastiao Soares de Resende. For a number of years, this churchman dared to question the Government for its treatment especially of African cotton growers. He wrote in his monthly pastoral letters, published in a Church publication, criticising the manner in which the Government was carrying out some of its African policies, but with little or no success. His intention, however, was to liberalize the policy rather than change it radically. When, finally, some of his criticisms began to annoy the Salazar regime, he was ordered by the Vatican to stop publishing them. Subsequently, the Government curtailed

some of the privileges which he had previously enjoyed, including taking away his responsibilities as the Director of the only secondary school in Beira. Bishop Resende is one of those Portuguese liberals who believe in the possibility of the creation of a new Brazil in Africa, where Portuguese culture would flourish even after independence. The impression one gets of his position, as gleaned from some of his pastorals and a daily newspaper which he is supposed to control, is that Bishop Resende can conceive of an independent Mozambique only within a community of Portuguese interests, cultural, religious and economic. However, since he has never felt compelled to formally state his position, we will refrain from speculating further.

The clearest statement ever made by a Portuguese Catholic leader of any standing concerning the question of self-determination and independence was by Monseigneur Custodio Alvim Ferreira, Auxiliary Bishop of Lourenco Marques. If his position is to be taken as representative of the Roman Catholic Church, then the Church is unequivocally against independence. In a recent circular which was read in all Catholic Churches and Seminaries in Mozambique, Bishop Pereira outlined ten points intended to convince the clergy that independence for the African people is not only wrong, but against the will of God. The Statement ran as follows:

I. Independence is irrelevant to the welfare of man. It can be good if the conditions are present — the cultural conditions do not yet exist in Mozambique (*sic*).

II. While these conditions are not being produced, to take part in movements for independence is acting against nature.

III. Even if these conditions existed, the Metropole has the right to oppose independence if the freedoms and rights of man are respected and if it (the Metropole) already provides for the well-being, and civil and religious progress of all.

IV. All movements which use force (terrorists) are against the Natural Law, because independence, if it is to be assumed that it is good, must be obtained by peaceful means.

V. When the movement is a terrorist one, the clergy have the obligation, in good conscience, not only to refrain from taking part, but also to oppose it. This (obligation) derives from the nature of his mission (as a religious leader).

VI. Even when the movement is peaceful, the clergy must abstain from it in order to have spiritual influence upon all people. The Superior of the Church may impose that abstention; he imposes it now from Lourenco Marques.

VII. The native peoples of Africa have the obligation to thank the colonialists for all the benefits which they receive from them.

VIII. The educated people have the duty of debunking those with less education of all the illusions of independence.

IX. The present independence movements have, almost all of them, the sign of revolt and communism; they have no reason;

we must not, therefore, support these movements. The doctrine of the Holy See is quite clear concerning atheistic and revolutionary communism. The great revolution is that of the Gospel.

X. The slogan 'Africa for the Africans' is a philosophical monstrosity and a challenge to the Christian civilization, because today's events tell us that it is Communism and Islam which wish to impose their civilization upon the Africans.

The reaction of our people to the above situation was, as can be expected, a demand for our freedom now.