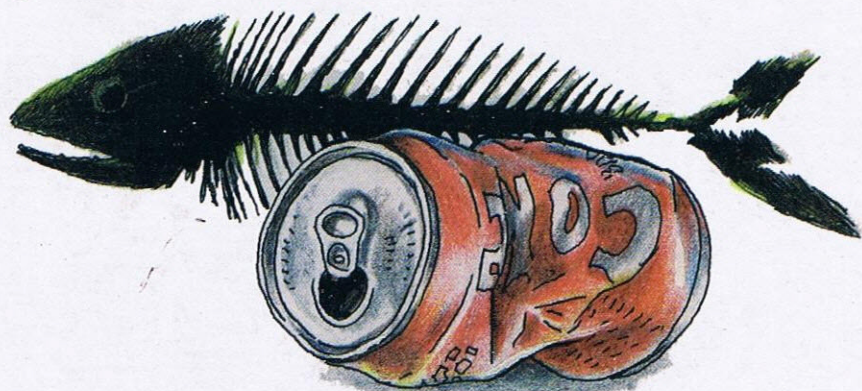




The Transforming



— of Goa —



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The Church in Goa: Giving to Cesar What is Cesar's?

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Nicodemus, a leading Jew, Pharisee and a politician who played it safe, once approached Jesus in the dark night to seek his divine advice. He left puzzled with the dilemma of remaining an adult and being born again and from above (Gospel of St. John 3:1-5). Elsewhere in the Gospels we come across the warning: "Anyone who does not welcome the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." (Mt.19:14; Lk.18:16; Mk.1:14) The Gospels are replete with metaphors of sheep and lambs. They all identify the faithful ones, the heirs to heaven.

Interpretations and misinterpretations of scriptural texts have contributed greatly to promote a Christian ethos in which passive submission to authority is identified with virtue and dissent with irreverence. Of course, the dominant groups of Christianity from metropolitan colonial churches read the lines differently for their own people, who were the chosen ones and divinely inspired to teach the natives tainted with pagan traditions. St Francis Xavier did not very much approve of this ambiguity of reading, and much less the attitudes and behaviour based on it on the part of the colonialists. If he

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called for the Inquisition to be set up in Goa, it was motivated by his annoyance at the bad example that the colonialists were setting to the new native converts.

In the course of centuries of domination the successive generations of Goans absorbed the submissiveness as part of their characteristic ethos (the so-called *sossegado* attitude). It is what defeat, conquest and humiliation did to them over time, while learning to cope with these experiences and survive. It may take as many centuries to heal these psychic wounds and to build a healthier identity, freer from over-reactions to the past, including an apparent passivity covering fears and lack of self-esteem. The freedom of the children of God, which is preached in the Bible, made little sense to the Goans for long, except to leave their native soil to migrate in search of daily bread. Still, both at home and wherever they migrated, they did not fail to compensate their humiliated self and frustrated aggressiveness by discriminating against each other in the form of caste and religious differences. Even the feeling of cultural openness that helped the migrants to adjust to new climes and West-dominated colonial ambience was a part of the same identity, which led most Goan Christians at home to seek greater affinity with the colonial brethren in religion. It is a complex of attitudes and feelings that needs a more thorough study.

(Incidentally, the Goan Hindus have their own variances of wounded identity, and it is not to be resolved too simplistically with reference to hurt religious feelings during the colonial past. A hardcore Pune brahmin, who headed a government department in Goa for nearly a decade and half, tried to settle down in Goa. He had bought a house close to Mangueshi temple and wishes to spend his retirement as a *Jyotishi*, but he left Goa after a couple of years and disappointed. He gave me an explanation that left me startled: "These Goan Hindus are different!")

Most Goan Christians who were faithful to the Goan Church magisterium collaborated with the Portuguese civilising mission that made of them a cultural tragicomedy. This mission was freshly emphasized by Dr Oliveira Salazar through the *Acto Colonial* of his *Estado Novo*, and the predecessor of the last Patriarch of Goa made a fine art of it in his 60 or so official letters addressed to the priests of the Archdiocese. These documents are a masterpiece of a magisterial teaching wedded to State politics. The leaders of the faithful were to teach that salvation lay with the Portuguese and in dissociating themselves from the cultural-political relationship with the rest of India. In the wake of the *satyagraha* movement in Goa, every time India put some additional pressure on Goa, pilgrimages were ar-

ranged to the tomb of St Francis Xavier to pray to the saint to deliver them from deliverance. It was rather broad-minded of the Portuguese to trust so much in the saint who in his life-time reacted very strongly against their colonial abuses, and against their zeal to conjugate wrong verbs and with wrong people!

In spite of Portugal's long history of anti-clericalism and unhappy relations with the Vatican, the *Estado Novo* of Salazar tried to uphold the ghost of *Padroado*. The great statesman, described by some as a good Catholic but a bad man, saw no ambiguity of his actions till the very end. His orders to adopt a scorched earth policy before abandoning the 'Rome of the East' in 1961 marked the tail-end of a sad story that began centuries earlier. The Portuguese were saved from ending their civilising mission in a barbaric manner by the intervention of a high-ranking Goan Christian, Dr Abel Colaço, who had understood Christianity better than the masters. His advice to the Patriarch and their joint intervention before a hesitant Governor General helped to avoid what the same Governor General later termed *um sacrificio inútil* (a wasted sacrifice), and was condemned by the home regime as a national traitor and forced into exile.

We cannot ignore a section of Goan Christians in Mumbai who made their contribution Goa's freedom struggle and also retained all their love for the traditional Goan Christianity. One of their leaders battled more recently to restore the Patriarchate to Goan Archdiocese. Incidentally, and unfortunately, his recent death merited little attention, despite his significant contribution to his homeland. Because of the package deal available to Goan Christians, and no as-sorted variety, the stray sheep were forced at various times to change their domicile to the neighbouring Indian territory and even face the charge of being bad Catholics, if not 'communist'. Of course, that was also the only alternative for most Goans who could not be accommodated in the non-existent Portuguese industry and stagnating agriculture. The Goan Catholics maintained a steady campaign in favour of Goa's liberation from Bombay and elsewhere had no hang-ups like the Goan Catholics inside Goa. They had the example of Cardinal Gracias of Bombay, and many other prominent Goan clergymen, who had come out openly in their condemnation of the Portuguese colonial rule in Goa and demanded that it should end. One of these priests was even considered in these circles as candidate for leading the Church of Goa when liberated from *Padroado* control. Another priest belonging to a native religious congregation was actively involved in sustaining the Church in the liberated enclaves of Dadra and Nagar Haveli. However, most of this participation in liberation struggle was non-violent, even though the Goan Catholic community

was most affected by the economic blockade imposed by the Indian authorities and the tax imposed by the Portuguese upon the remittances of money to relatives in Goa.

My one conclusion is that this section of Goan Catholics in India (outside Goa) were behaving as naughty children in the eyes of the Portuguese patronized Church. But, with a few outstanding exceptions, they were behaving as children all the same. They retained all the traditional timidity and unwillingness to risk by confronting the State authorities, and kept up the old game of 'wait-and-see' till it was safe to take sides and have a share in the gains. One stalwart of the Bombay-based Goan Christians had even coined a motto with his penchant for rhetoric: "Rome-rule is home-rule". He was knighted with a papal award. But as already stated, this section of Goans need not be considered as a monolith. Some outstanding figures, like Prof Armando Menezes, and the Goan Jesuit in Bombay, Albert Mendonça, faced the wrath of the colonialists within their local church and religious order. The history of their experiences and of such others is yet to be written.

To complete my picture of Goan Catholicism and its stand vis-a-vis Goa's freedom struggle, it would be too facile a generalization to lay at the feet of Catholics alone the responsibility for the obvious absence of a mass liberation movement in Goa. To quote Juliao Menezes in his *Goa's Freedom Struggle* (1947): "There is clear evidence to show that the Hindu Sabhites among the Goan Hindus have joined hands with Catholic Action agents" and "a large number of Saraswat Brahmins are collaborating with Catholic Actionists and the Portuguese Government...Some of these men are even misusing the name and authority of the National Congress (Goa)." In such a murky situation of the pre-Liberation days it is difficult to assign to any single group the glory of untarnished championship of Goa's freedom struggle. V N Lawande (the *Loundo* who had struck terror in the ranks of the Portuguese rulers and their native collaborators) admitted, during a seminar on Oral History of Goa's Freedom Struggle organised by me at the Xavier Centre of Historical Research some years ago, that he had experienced much goodwill among many village Catholics in the course of his terrorist campaign. Once he was nearly captured by the vigilant police inside a village where he had gone to purchase a carbine, but they failed to detect their most-wanted man who crossed their roadblock in a car donning a priest's soutane and saying beads. This life-saving ruse was made possible by a sympathetic Catholic family. Mr Lawande also admitted that the Catholics who were sympathetic to the cause would have been more emotionally involved if they could keep in touch with the devel-

opments through papers and leaflets that were secretly circulated in the Marathi script which was more easily accessible to the Marathi-reading Hindu population.

The liberation of Goa would be impossible without direct intervention of the Indian armed forces. However, if Operation Vijay was effected at the close of 1961, its urgency was dictated more by the prospects of the ruling party in the national elections that were scheduled for February 1962, and even more by India's diplomatic stakes in the Non-Aligned Movement. At the Belgrade Conference in September 1961, India's leadership seemed questioned by the African bloc struggling against Portuguese colonialism. Though India had been the initiator of the anti-colonial revolution, she appeared to have lost militancy. The African bloc claimed that a strong action by Nehru in Goa would enhance and even make easier the African revolution, a claim that was confirmed by General Spínola in his *Portugal e o Futuro* (1974). There was also China working hard to undercut Nehru's leadership of the Afro-Asian States. It was to counter these trends and to refurbish his image that Nehru was compelled to sponsor a seminar on Portuguese colonialism in Delhi beginning October 20, 1961. Operation Vijay became an unavoidable next step.

What was happening in the meantime on the Church front? While the press at the local, national and international levels was agog with news of an imminent intervention by India to end the Portuguese rule which it defined in the world fora as "permanent aggression on Indian nationalism", the official Church Bulletin of the Goa Archdiocese carried, in its December 1961 issue, a boldface announcement that Rome had appointed Dom Jose Pedro da Silva as the new Auxiliary Bishop for Goa and with the right for succession as Patriarch. This Azores-born country-cousin of the Patriarch Alvernaz was at this time based in Lisbon and in charge of the politically suspect Catholic Action Movement, an institution which has not yet merited the attention of the historians of Portuguese colonialism at this period of time. It looks as if no qualified and experienced Goan candidate was available for the post, and the approval of such a nomination by the Vatican at such a juncture of Goa's history seemed out of tune with the concerns that Vatican had just voiced so very forcefully through John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra*. Was it just a coincidence that soon after Portugal lost its control over Goa, the former Patriarch of Goa (1942-53), whose "official letters" and patriotic zeal have already been mentioned by us, should be made a Cardinal and given a job at the Vatican? Was it another instance of "be cunning as a serpent" diplomacy of the Vatican? Was not the title of the Patriarch given to the Archdiocese of Goa a sop to stop the whin-

ing of the *Padroado* boys at a time when the Vatican decided to create an independent Indian Church hierarchy in 1886? And had not Rome sent a Golden Rose to Goa Archdiocese to soothe the Portuguese indignation in the wake of the Vatican decision to create the first Cardinal for independent India? If the liberation of Goa did not cause any violent upheaval in the administration of the Church of Goa, the Vatican diplomacy deserves the least credit for it. Even to see some good reason to retain the patriarchate in Goa (or rather to confer it upon a native), it took the Vatican more time than the new Portuguese socialist rulers to renounce the relics of their *Padroado* rights.

Following Goa's liberation, the Portuguese Patriarch maintained, very wisely, a low profile. Fortunately for him and for the Church of Goa, the inauguration of the Vatican Council II in Rome provided the best excuse to move out of an uneasy situation before the end of 1962. Msgr Francisco Xavier da Piedade Rebello then emerged as the head of the Church of Goa and its natural leader. He was consecrated Bishop and Administrator Apostolic of Goa in 1963. He had silently served more than one Patriarch as Secretary, as Chancellor, and as Vicar General. Only the political liberation made a recognition of his services possible. In the earlier dispensation, a couple of Goans were considered fit to rule, at the best, over some African diocese! Unfortunately, some high ranking dissident voices in the Church and politics of Portugal were effectively silenced by the dictatorial regime in Portugal itself. Hence, there was little hope of change in the colonies. The Portuguese citizens themselves had become victims of their own devices, and only an experience of their own enabled them, in time, to sympathise with the plight of the colonised peoples. But somewhat late to redeem the past.

The New Dispensation and the Church

The political developments of the post-Liberation period have been complex and do not lend themselves to simple explanations. A large section of the population and its ideological leadership were joyous at integration with India. The Portuguese-educated landed gentry preferred to nurse their disappointment within their closed gossip circles or occasionally voiced it in the columns of *O Heraldo* which they patronised less with subscription and more by reading borrowed issues. The dreams of some of a Goan republic became irrelevant overnight. The democratic process in Goa began where it should have, namely, at the village level. Panchayati Raj was brought into existence within less than a year after liberation. The elections held

in October 1962 changed the entire character of the political process in Goa. No elections of the Portuguese-type had any parallel with the universal suffrage that brought the propertyless and uneducated masses into consideration for the first time, giving them a sense of self-dignity. The elections for the first State Assembly the following year further strengthened the political process. The classes that had been most neglected by the Portuguese rule and, consequently, by the more advanced classes of the Goan population, suddenly shot to power. Hindu Brahmins and Christian *bhatkars* entered a period of expiation for past sins.

The Maharashtrawadi Gomantak Party (MGP) and its *Bahujan Samaj* ideology was an expression of populism that sought to whip up communal feelings. The Marathi language was used for this along with the merger issue. The penetration of the rural electorate was also done most effectively with promises of land reforms that would give land to the tiller. As most tenants were non-Christian and non-Brahmin, the MGP forced a response from these sections in self-defence. While the Hindu elite vote got divided between the Congress and United Goans Party (UGP), most Christians rallied around UGP despite the fact that mass conversions effected four and half centuries ago had not made them equal through baptism, either socially or economically.

The victory of the MGP with an absolute majority in the first elections and its continued rule over Goa for more than a decade may be considered as the best thing that could happen to the majority of the Goans who had for too long been denied their rightful place. The personality and innate populist style of operating of the late D B Bandodkar gave the downtrodden, for the first time in their lives a sense of self-importance, which the traditional elite classes interpreted as vulgar insolence. Even if social justice under the new dispensation only meant a shifting of injustice from one section of the population to another, the new rule marked a sharp break from the past quasi-feudal ethos that prevailed in Goa. Any other party in power at this critical juncture of Goa's history might have only replaced the old foreign colonial rule with a milder (?) native version of it.

How did the Church fare in the new dispensation? The church of Goa has been accused of encouraging a vote to keep Goa out of Maharashtra in the first Assembly elections and in the Opinion Poll of 1967 which marked the end of a major phase in Goa's political scenario. (Incidentally, I can vouch personally for the large number of under-aged seminarians of Rachol Seminary who voted in the Opinion Poll against merger of Goa.) After 1967, religion and caste con-

tinued to provide pre-given organisational and mobilisational platforms as elsewhere in the country, but political alliances followed more the class interests, cutting across traditional religious and caste groupings. This new phase coincided with the major changes within the Catholic Church at the national and international levels. There had been major self-questioning within the Church following Vatican II, and the responsibility of the laity was being stressed. To implement Vatican II, there was a seminar on "The Church in Goa Today" in 1968, in preparation for the national seminar on "The Church in India Today" in 1970. The seminar in Goa prepared the ground for an organised renewal of the Archdiocese. The immediate results were the establishment of a Priest's Senate, some Diocesan Centres for special apostolates, and a Pastoral Bulletin. It took ten years to set up a Diocesan Pastoral Council, and to establish parish level councils that are not yet a reality everywhere. This process faced protests, and the traditional attitudes of the hierarchy were not always prepared to face them. But this is not new to the Church of Goa. Under the Portuguese rule a native Bishop and priests had instigated rebellions. In the post-Liberation context it was an experience of the democratic revolution inside an ecclesiastical set-up that was not sufficiently cleaned from the inherited attitudes and *modus operandi*. The challenges from within came from different quarters: from lay people as well as from diocesan priests, religious priests and even from nuns! Ironically, from ladies first, when a nun refused to move out from a Church-owned institute for social service, and where the Church wanted to set up its own offices.

There were some priests who had their personal agendas that did not receive official approval and went seeking support from other quarters, including the government. Among the cases that invited greater publicity were the Christ-Ashram of Nuvem, the Independent Church of Cuncoim, the Women's Hostel at Panjim, and the Verna Ashram of the dissident group of Pilar Fathers. Incidentally, the "orthodox" section of this latter group is led now by Tiburcio Ferrao, who waited for his turn to be included in the Council of Advisors of the Patriarch to hit at the Jesuits and even block the renewal of their contract to work in the Archdiocese. All this to settle scores with the writer of this essay, who some years ago contributed to an issue of *Goa Today* devoted to the theme "Struggle for Sainthood". I had said there that Fr Agnelo deserved to be canonised too, just as much as Fr Joseph Vaz, because he would serve as a powerful model to diocesan clergy in modern times of growing secularism. Fr Agnelo had died as Spiritual Father of the diocesan priests of Goa at the time when the Republican ideas of anti-clericalism were not a great encouragement for priesthood. However, my great sin that Fr

Tiburcio and his mentors did not forgive consisted in my referring to the division and scandal within their congregation as the most serious obstacle for the process which they were trying to promote! Though he had picked up 'suitable' excerpts from my many writings, the real *casus belli*, the above mentioned article seems to have escaped his attention! Fr Tiburcio demanded from the Archbishop the appointment of an inquiry committee to investigate the orthodoxy of my writings and the value of the research activities of the Xavier Centre of Historical Research for the Church of Goa. It was only after I received a clean chit of the eight-man committee (curiously the accuser never attended any meeting with me) that I decided to move out of Goa, though for reasons that had nothing to do with such petty concerns and mentality of such leading Goan churchmen.

Returning to the survey of the last four decades of Church leadership in Goa, one can say that each decade was marked by a challenge, and the Church leadership fared noticeably well, despite the kind of disabilities that have been referred to. The challenge of the '60s was survival, and it was over with the Opinion Poll and the role the Church played in influencing the vote. The challenge of the '70s went down into history with the support lent by the Church to the *ramponkar* or traditional fishermen whose interests were in jeopardy as a result of large scale trawling and mechanised fishing. A circular from the Archbishop on January 30, 1978 irked the then chief minister, Mrs Shashikala Kakodkar, who extended the war by supporting a rebel nun and laying State claims to the premises in question and for several other Church properties. The government also tried to humiliate the Archbishop by threatening to withdraw his priority pass for ferry-crossing. Such pettiness probably contributed to decreasing the popularity of the chief minister before the Christian public and to the downfall of her government in 1979 and her political limbo ever since. It is important to recall that the elections coincided with the elections to the Lok Sabha and the Christian community was already strongly agitated over the issue of Freedom of Religion Bill, 1978 brought forward by a Janata MP. The hostility of the chief minister and the reactions to Tyagi Bill got mixed up, with bad consequences for the chief minister.

The decade of the '80s saw the agitation for official language. The understanding of the issue left no doubt that the language issue was used and continues to be used by the politicians in a communal fashion because of the economic implications. Marathi as official language could give the majority community a privileged position regarding employment opportunities, economic power and, consequently, political domination. Hence it was a socio-economic issue

on which depended the right of future generations for equal share of bread and butter. The Church Bulletin of February 1, 1987 expressed the stand of the Church in solidarity with the people. When the Official Language Bill was passed, the Pastoral Bulletin welcomed the compromise as a better part of realism, though it did not hide its disappointment manifested in the use of a rather strong expression "bigamy" to describe the place accorded to Marathi in the Bill (*Renovação*, March 1, 1987, p.85). Another issue that drew the Church's serious concern during the past decades, and more particularly in the '80s, was the corruption of the youth through commercialisation of Carnival as Christian tradition. Since 1963 the government had developed Carnival as a tourist attraction, and it was noticed that drug abuse was crawling into it. The Carnival float in Delhi in 1983 marked the beginning of an organised opposition of the church in Goa, objecting to "the values projected during the celebration as they jeopardised the ethical values". The Pastoral Bulletin of February 1, 1984 warned sternly against the "coming *tamasha* of Carnival". It warned the Catholics not to allow their children to become easy prey and pleasure toys for the benefit of the tourism industry. The Church went a step further and protested against the use of the Panjim Church square for the celebration of Carnival. The Church stand had its impact, and Carnival has been a muted affair ever since. Early in 1990 the Archdiocese also hosted a Consultation on Tourism, sponsored by the Catholic Bishops Conference of India. But day to day opposition is no longer from the Church, but from socially concerned individuals and watch groups, such as Goa Foundation and *Jagrut Goenkaranchem Fauz*, that have been keeping an effective check on the abuses of drugs and environment by powerful interest groups.

If we have to draw a balance sheet of the pastoral effectiveness of the Church of Goa, it has definitely been on the positive side. This, in my view, was also greatly due to a more educated and self-confident laity of Goa, than to the clergy. Fortunately, the clergy has also grown with the experience of its shortcomings at all levels, and is now much better equipped to continue building the kingdom of God on Earth without leaving all concerns to life beyond. It benefited immensely from the challenges thrown by the political liberation, as well as by Vatican II. The two almost coincided, and to that extent it has a greater merit for its achievements, and for its ability to "be born again" with the freedom of the children of God and of the mother country. The Gospel challenge thrown to Nicodemus was thus realised in the context of the Goan Church.