

Political power and religious power during the first portuguese liberal revolution: Relations among State, Church and Religion (1820-3)

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I - Relations among State, Church and Religion during the first liberal revolution in Portugal is the purpose of this presentation. The chosen approach is to query how the relationship between political and ecclesiastical powers changed during a revolutionary context, also strongly affected by religious ideas about Catholic Christianity. And, of course, how the reforms adopted by protagonists - I mean, the *practises* – show us these ideological aspects. I'll bring it in ten topics, the first part concerning specific context and the second the concrete liberal policy on the subject.

First remark: In order to understand the real dimension of the changes that liberals intended to adopt about religious matters, in my research it has been necessary to discern among the Church as an institutional reality (so, subject of a political approach), the Clergy *Order* as a social group, partially belonging to the landlord class (so, subject of a social approach), and Religion as a system of ideas and beliefs (so, requiring an ideological analysis).

Second remark: As far as I remember, I never found the word 'democracy' used in my various sources, such as speeches in the Parliament, sacred oratory, newspapers, political or religious pamphlets, citizens' requests addressed to the Parliament and Government, among others. I mean: this concept never has been used neither by protagonists of political sphere nor by those of ecclesiastical sphere, despite the urgent need they had to build a new core of vocabulary to express the several changes that the mentors of the revolution wanted to introduce in the new political order.

However, in the process of portuguese transition, the changes of relations between the Church and the lay society, as well as a new civil status of clergy members – men and women included – brought a new legal framework to allow them to be real without denying of religious principles.

Third remark: Attaining these legal framework did not happen without ideological differences, beeing the Parliament an excelent stage to aknowledge it. Those differences weren't the result of confrontations between believers and atheists, neither between Christians (on a general speaking) and Catholic Christians, nor between lays and ecclesiastics; and sometimes, not even between liberals and absolutists, because I could observe that such diversity of positions belonged both to followers of political change and to their opponents. My point is that it's impossible to find just one contradiction able to provide us a perspective of diversity of positions. In fact, the majority of

citizens claimed to be true Christians and even Roman Catholics. Despite this, the language used to assert different positions had often a certain idea of religion against another certain idea.

Some of these beliefs were related to deep convictions about the link between each person and his Creator: were matters of Faith – just closer to the Dogma's core. But most of them referred to the Catholic Church Discipline – precisely those involving the relationship between the power of the Church, at national and roman level, and the power of the Portuguese State. Church Discipline has been object of faster changeable decisions than Dogma's along the history of Roman Catholicism and so turning problems of conscience easier to solve by policy-makers, whether they were lays or ecclesiastics. Disagreements belonged mostly to the political sphere; nevertheless, the interests of the two powers took place mainly in an environment of religious confrontation.

Fourth remark: The State power to make laws concerning Clergy and National Church, a royal privilege named *regalismo*, was an essential frame of Catholic States since Early Modern period. This privilege was the counterpart of the duty to protect, by wich the Absolutist State had to make effective the dominance of Catholicism over his subjects. Despite this, it was strongly used by liberal policy-makers during the portuguese *Vintismo*, though our first liberal period (1820-3) has been the most radical experience on political scope, in order to establish Liberalism until it prevailed (1834). And the philosophical oposition between *regalismo* 'power and liberalism wasn't so strong as the necessity to assure the triumph of the new political regime.

Fifth remark: What should I say shortly, about the importance of portuguese Clergy under the last *Ancien Régime*? He began to loose dimension since the second half of XVIII century, trough the faster increase of population and also the decrease of entries in the Clergy. The decrease has been much more felt by regular clerics, in the old days, most of them, and 1820, seculars were about three quarters of them all. It was also a deeply stratified Order, both among the regulars within the secular clerics. And yet, among the different social segments, those depending on land rights were the high clergy both secular (bishops and canonics) and regular (monastics). On the other hand, public opinion saw unparish ecclesiastics more and more as a parasitic group, on account of beeing, mostly supported by religious offers and tributs: the mendicant corporations as well as more than 40% of the seculars. Nevertheless, in 1820, this Order meant 1% or 1,1% of population, like in Spain in the same period, and aproximately the double of French clergy'rate when the revolution of 1789 came.

II - Revolution and reforms

Let's now look to *Vintismo*'s reforms towards the Church and Clergy, on wich I distinguish five sets:

- the laws aiming towards the national church structures (the *Igreja Lusitana*) and the corresponding ecclesiastical group;
- those looking to the high clergy as a part of the seignorial class;
- reforms supporting economic State needs and reducing social and economic crisis, where ecclesiastical segments were aimed at as well as others;
- some legal measures to forbid civil servant's public hostility against the new regime;
- those laws aiming the Church and the Clergy over their ideological power.

I must keep short; so I'll refer those more relevants to enforce the new political concepts in the legal framework.

First set: The freedoms to think, express oneself, or of press: all those Liberal 'sacred' frames opposed the Church's power over the minds. So, since their very first days, deputies suppressed the Inquisition Court¹ and the episcopal censorship over press (the *Index* or the forbidden books list). During the three liberal years, public expression and assembly freedoms, increased clubs newspapers and pamphlets, civic requests and petitions, speaking and talking about 'religious' matters being ecclesiastics specially well prepared to use it, as intellectuals. And they did that; largely.

Yet, to enforce it, liberals used the royal privilege of *Placet*, consisting in a Government's previous consent to diffuse papist and episcopal laws inside the national territory.

Parliament also approved a law education rule, making lays able to create private schools, until then under ecclesiastic monopoly. The same right was extensive to individual clerics, from then on don't depending on hierarchical approval.

Second: Some new taxation in order to support Public Debt was created depending on income levels criteria. Among other social segments, the target was the high and middle clergy, with emphasis on regular corporations. This was a direct consequence of legal equality for citizens, abolishing the former exemptions².

Third: On a different level *Vintismo* 'regime mindered ecclesiastical powers of National and Roman Church, aiming to get real the purpose of legal equality: when it suppressed the major part of

¹ Holy Office

² In old Society of Orders Clergy was widely tax's isempt. Meanwhile, whenever special needs of Crown – as wars for instance – impose new incomes through tributes, those had legal nature of volunteer gifts acordeed by negotiation between royal ministers and Clergy representants.

immunities and specific ecclesiastical courts of justice. Namely, taking the lay population away from church's jurisdiction and only allowing spiritual sanctions concerning religious transgressions, not only for laics as well as for clergy members.

Doing that, Parliament imposed a clear division between political and religious spheres of power. The same purpose occurred from several casuistic measures that it's impossible to refer here.

Fourth: Most reforms intended to change former seignorial nature of National Church and High Clergy. Part of their richness came from specific religious tributes, as ecclesiastical tithes on agriculture production, other part from land rights owned as landlords. And both forms were largely shared with Aristocracy. But there was also a heavy number of gifts and taxation over liturgical acts, namely collected by parish priests without access to tithes.

Through such specific set of decisions, Liberals aimed several goals: to deepen legal equality; to develop a productive agriculture; to get low peasantry situation easier, reducing religious fiscality to one single tax; to direct land labour incomes to a new middle class of farmers. Last but not least, when policy-makers decided give back the tithes to parishes, they wanted to accomplish their duty of protecting people's religion, providing communities with a parochial clergy don't depending on gifts and extorsions. This reform wasn't accomplished, although one of the more expected by parochial servants themselves: counter-revolution arrived before the project could come at Parliament for final approval.

Fifth: The legal measures to forbid civil servants an hostile attitude against new institutions are far from liberal philosophy. I mean: they came from a State reason, which was its survival as regime. The most important was the imposition of Oaths of allegiance in most relevant moments of the constitutional frame process, for the clerics classified as ecclesiastical civil servants (parish priests, canons and bishops) and for others as owners of Crown's lands (*donatários da Coroa*). Another imposition, specifically for bishops and parish priests, was the order to diffuse pastoral letters instructing populations about the new regime legitimacy.

However, those impositions also show us another side of Liberalism which is their nationalism; in fact, in this specific context, policy of *regalismo* was the frame to turn effective the State power against foreign interferences, as Roman Popes used to do since the start of liberal revolutions in Western Europe.

III - Summarizing:

Liberal policy didn't attack Catholicism. Policy-makers affirmed their religious beliefs all the time, and this was clear on the goals of number of laws. Even more, the left wing permanently affirmed they wanted to restore the orthodox praxis coming from the former Christianity, even if they wanted to reform some aspects. Making reforms, the Parliament and the Government were quite sure to accomplish their mission with political and religious legitimacies;

On the other hand, during the 1820 revolution, after all, the progressive secularization of State, giving it more independence from Ecclesiastical power; the adoption of all forms of free expression and legal equality for citizens, the intent of working for a less unequal society, where richness could be distributed to a larger number of social groups, and the approach of *regalismo* as a nationalistic policy, all those perceptible aspects on reforms concerning Church and Clergy belong to the political framework of Liberalist ideology.

My final conclusion is: regarding religious policy of liberals during *Vintismo* period and being Democracy one of Liberal ideology's left legacies it wasn't an hazard that, according some historians later in nineteenth century, *Vintistas* used to be known by Democratic Party or Democratics, precisely as sinonimous of Liberals' left wing.

Thank you all.