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Adélio Torres Neiva C.S.Sp.

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Adélio Torres Neiva,
C.S.Sp.

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Fr. Torres Neiva was a former member of the Spiritan General Council. A history graduate of the University of Coimbra, he was a member of the Academy of History (Portugal). He taught missiology at the Catholic University of Lisbon. He was director of the revue “*Missão Espiritana*” and also of the journal of the Conference of Religious in Portugal, “*Vida Conseagrada*.” He died in 2009 and his study of Joachim Alves Correia has been adapted by José Costa, CSSp.

(Translated by John Kilcrann,
C.S.Sp.)

JOACHIM ALVES CORREIA, C.S.SP. CHAMPION OF THE POOR ON THREE CONTINENTS

Fragments of a Life

Father Joachim Alves Correia (1886 – 1951), a Spiritan missionary, was one of the most prominent figures in Church circles and social life in Portugal during his lifetime. He studied theology in France, in Chevilly-Larue, and was ordained to the priesthood on October 28, 1910, just a few days after the setting up of the Republic in Portugal. He requested to be sent as a missionary to Angola, but because of the political situation the country was facing, he was sent to Nigeria, which was then a British colony, to work in Eke on Bishop Shanahan’s project. Some time later he left for Enugu with a group of emigrants who were working there in the coal mines. He remained with this group for about eight years. There he set up a secondary school that still functions. His name is still remembered today in Nigeria; he stayed there until 1919.

Around this time Bishop Moisés Alves de Pinho began the restoration of the Province of Portugal, and Father Alves Correia was one of his chief collaborators. He founded and directed a missionary magazine, *Missões de Angola e Congo* (The Missions of Angola and the Congo), and in 1922 he became mission procurator. He held this function until 1945. Working as procurator, he cared for missionaries as they arrived and departed; he worked at mission promotion; he gave talks all over the country and wrote a few dozen books and over a thousand articles in various journals and magazines.

Seara Novo (The New Harvest) was the magazine he most frequently wrote for. This publication provided a link between various writers focusing on the values of democracy and the Metanóia group whose membership was largely of university-linked Catholics, who wanted to renew the Church from within because they believed it was out of touch and was overly Tridentine in its approach for that time. He encouraged them to hope for a Church council which would bring renewal.

Alves Correia was a young priest with a passion for the gospel and a passion for the poor. He knew how to read the signs of the times. He used his ability as a gifted writer to alert the sleeping consciences of a people who had not only been hoodwinked but

also oppressed. His articles and his talks intensely annoyed the dictatorial regime of Salazar, which maintained the people in ignorance and poverty and gave no indication of wishing to open itself to democracy.

*...was the straw that
broke the camel's back...*

An article that he wrote in 1946 and published in the *A República* entitled *O Mal e a Caramunha* (Evil and Murmuring) was the straw that broke the camel's back and provoked the process that led to his expulsion and exile. The Congregation of the Holy Spirit now faced a dilemma: either it would have to encourage him to leave the country discreetly, or he would be arrested and thrown into Tarrafal prison where political prisoners were held. With considerable fear that governmental vindictiveness would bring negative consequences for the congregation, especially for the missionaries working in Angola, the Portuguese Province, with the support of the Mother House, decided to send him to the United States in February 1946.

He received a warm welcome from the American confreres. He was also intrigued with social progress in the United States. However, Father Alves Correia had difficulties in finding a pastoral ministry where he would feel that he was useful to the people and be fulfilled as a Spiritan. He was sent first to San Diego, California, to be assistant pastor in a parish of Portuguese immigrants. The impression given was that there he found life too easy and without much purpose. The work that he took on did not fulfill him. He tried to fill the void by preaching some retreats and by writing for a Portuguese newspaper based in New Bedford called *Diário de Notícias* (Daily News). His articles were very widely read and commented on and the Portuguese government again began to take notice. An angry Salazar demanded that the superiors silence him. The provincial contacted the Generalate to notify it of what was happening. The response from the Superior General was not the expected one: "Having consulted the Council, I prohibit him in the name of the vow, to write anything for the newspapers."¹

*...the Portuguese
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He humbly accepted the decision of the General Council but felt useless as an assistant pastor. Angered with the prohibition to write, Father Alves Correia considered leaving the congregation. He wrote to the Prefect Apostolic of Portuguese Guinea, who accepted him. Becoming aware of the situation, the U.S. Provincial, Father Collins, offered him a professorship at Duquesne University. He very willingly accepted this proposal.

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*...taught politics and
ethics at Duquesne
University.*

Between 1947 and his death in 1951, Father Alves Correia taught politics and ethics at Duquesne University. The peace that he now enjoyed allowed him to engage in an extensive correspondence on social questions with Portuguese and American friends. During vacation periods he gave conferences and retreats to immigrants. In this way he made contact with Dorothy Day, a Christian anarchist who became a driving force in the Christian renewal of society. Day was the founder of the *Catholic Worker*. Here, Father Alves Correia contributed articles where he presented his social thinking. He wrote over 500 articles during the period he spent at Duquesne.

The historian of the Congregation, Henry Koren, who was also a professor at the same university, commented about him: *“I always had a great admiration for him and his intrepid criticism of the Salazar government. He was an excellent professor even with the Portuguese accent which characterized his use of English.”* In the dining room of Trinity Hall in Duquesne there is a mural of the last Supper. The talented painter placed known faces on the apostles around Christ. One of these apostles has the head of Father Alves Correia.

He died in a Pittsburgh hospital on June 1, 1951, from cancer. He had been unable to return to Portugal to say a final farewell to his loved ones, to his confreres and friends. His funeral took place on the fifth of the same month in the university church and was presided over by the rector, Father Vernon Gallagher, joined by almost fifty priests as concelebrants. To perpetuate his memory, the Portuguese Spiritans gave the name Center Father Alves Correia (C.E.P.A.C.) to the center of welcome and support for immigrants and refugees, which they founded in 1992. His political rehabilitation came about in 1980 when he was decorated posthumously with the Official of the Order of Liberty (Oficial da Ordem da Liberdade) medal by the then-President Mário Soares.

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Principal Ideas in his Thinking

It is above all through his writings that we can glimpse the richness he left us: the magazine, journal and newspaper articles; the conferences he gave were the pulpits where he announced the Reign of God. His literary work is characterized by two great thought lines: the goodness of God and the dignity of the human person. Father Alves Correia was a missionary, and being a missionary meant announcing the gospel in the new context of his day: a context without liberty of thought and a Church which accepted this and had absolutely no impact on society. He was in

fact an evangelizer in the society of his time in the difficult space of the intellectual world and culture.

*...immersed itself in the
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The Goodness of God

His thinking immersed itself in the Gospel of the Beatitudes where the poor in spirit, the pure of heart, mercy and love, and the persecuted for the cause of justice are all exalted. As a point of departure, Father Alves Correia plunged deeply into the love of God. For him, everything emanated from the true image of God. In defining this image, the attributes and adjectives most commonly used were infinite goodness, love, infinite love, omnipotent love, and goodness without limit, mercy, divine mercy, infinite truth and supreme truth. For him, God was Father. When God made us children, God's manner of being was communicated to us: goodness, mercy, compassion and heart. For him, the Christian was someone who inherited the heart of God.

The Extent of the Reign of God

Father Correia, at the request of various readers, gathered into one volume a series of articles that he had written, which he called *A Largueza do Reino de Deus* (The Extent of the Reign of God). Two further books were published: *De que Espírito Somos* (Of What Spirit are We) and the *Vida Mais Alta* (The Higher Life).

*...the Reign of God
surpassed the horizons of
time and space...*

In his broad vision, the Reign of God surpassed the horizons of time and space and was something much greater than the Church. The Church was the privileged historical and visible setting of the Reign of God, but this Reign extended itself to all people of good will. The Holy Spirit works intensely in many souls that the prejudices of race and the errors of history separated, but here Christ also works, even though in a mysterious way. All people are children of God, and God sees them and loves them despite the walls history constructs to divide peoples and religions.

The Reign of God takes in not only separated Christians, but includes all people of good will. Father Correia commented "*Those in the Reign of God and His Christ, by divine grace are all those who are sincere, good, and loyal, even though they are lost or have gone astray without fault, or because of stubbornness in the mists of ideological confusions, even though they distrust the official Church and its clergy, or even if they have been tempted by the illusion of heresy and revolt. True adversaries of Christ are those who are selfish, sensual by principle, the cynical and hypocrites and all*

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those who consciously subscribe to lies or injustice, no matter what sect they belong to, even no matter if they wish to be regular Catholics or party members.” For Father Correia, the Reign of God was the open arms of a father for whom all are children.

This largesse of the Reign of God was characterized by a profound respect and love for the poor and the rich, for Catholics and non-Catholics, and for believers and non-believers. He commented *“The Heavenly Father commands the sun and the rain to visit the fields of the just and sinners.”* (Matthew 5:45) For this reason he made numerous references to Saint Francis of Assisi, the *poverello*, whom he admired, a person who sang the praises of God, who included all creatures: Brother Sun, the rain, the wind and even Sister Death.

The Reign of God and the Church

Alves Correia drew a distinction between the Church and the Reign of God. The Church exists in time because of divine initiative, divine gifts and human structures, and is situated in history. The Reign of God is God’s plan for the salvation of humanity; it is heavenly, eschatological and is greater than time and history. The Church, inserted as it is in the world, is marked by sin.

The Reign of God is holiness: the values of the Reign of God are bigger than the Church. During the course of history, the Reign of God has become visible in the Church, but this presence of God’s Reign in the Church, even if it is destined to grow, is always mysterious and generative. The Church is not identified with the Reign of God; it is the sign and sacrament of this Reign.

The Dignity of the Human Person

A second element that demonstrates the extent of the Reign of God is the dignity of the human person. For Father Alves Correia, humanity created in the image and likeness of God was as sacred as God. For him, democracy consisted in liberty of spirit, in fraternity and equality -- all of these as seen from on high, from the heart of God. Respect for the individuality and dignity of the human person was seen as contrary to authoritarianism, which smothers individual initiative.

Father Alves Correia was passionate about the dignity of the human person. His writings are eloquent expression of this. He commented: *“The dignity of the human person is so great that compared to it, all other understandings of dignity invented by*

human beings melt into insignificance. Before God, that is before Supreme Truth and Reality as Saint Paul said, there is neither slave nor free, Greek nor barbarian, Jew nor Gentile, there is neither man nor woman. What exists are children of God who have rights, and if these are harmed it is God who will feel the injury.”

...demands respect for those who may think differently or indeed for those who err.

All humans should be respected because their dignity comes from God, and this dignity cannot be attacked or ignored by anyone. An offence committed against a fellow human being is an offence committed against God. In the Reign of God there is neither small nor great; there is no difference in the rights of men and women. All are children of God, all are brothers and sisters. For this reason every human being should be treated with humility and love, and their liberty should be respected. It is from this liberty that true love and each individual personality emanate. This demands respect for those who may think differently or indeed for those who err. Father Correia lived at a time when all truth was one and came from the regime in power; it was for this reason that he suffered persecution.

Human Rights

The Right to Liberty

The dignity of the human person demands that each person's rights be respected. Human rights were promulgated by the Gospel. Amongst these rights, Father Alves Correia emphasized liberty since this was the most commonly attacked right in his day. We all have the right to defend our liberty as well as a sacred duty to respect the rights of others. Rights and duties are sacred spaces that mutually interact, and nobody in the name of their own liberty has the right to oppress the liberty of other people. However, Father Alves Correia did not speak from abstract theory. The doctrine he outlined was for human governance in the context of earthly realities. For this reason he spoke of democracy as a regime of liberty. He commented: *“When we exalt democracy as the most human, perfect and Christian form of organizing social life, nobody sees us as fools who do not comprehend the defects in democracies. To err is also human. The truth is that democracy is an effort at liberty in equality and for fraternity.”*

Rights and duties are sacred spaces that mutually interact...

In spite of the defects of democracy, it permits liberties that are an untouchable right whenever such liberties are for the common good, when they favor and defend equal opportunities and serve to promote the full capacity of humans in society. Obviously, defending democracy during a dictatorship had political implications.

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C.S.Sp.

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The Right to a Dignified Life

To respond to poverty, which impedes a dignified life, an evangelical response is necessary that will focus not only on ourselves, but also on our goods -- bread shared for a new world. A vast multitude of brothers and sisters, nearby and far away, await our open hands in order to feel and proclaim that "God is Lord, the only and true Lord of the goods of all the earth."

Already during his time, Father Alves Correia, attentive to the social and political reality as well as social inequalities, denounced in a prophetic style: "*We do not know if we ourselves will be the witnesses of the noisy and painful fall of the admirable civilization which capitalism constructed. But when we see the ever more numerous and wretched victims of this civilization, we don't need to be prophets to imagine the force of the storm which is coming.*" Without the collaboration of all - poor and rich, developed countries and underdeveloped countries, it would be impossible to leave the infernal circle that is the poverty of the masses.

The right to human dignity cannot be used as an excuse to give to the poor only what is left over. There is no justice when spending on that which is superfluous amounts to what could resolve the hunger of so many brothers and sisters. There is no justice when confronted with the most elementary needs of others; we engage in blind consumerism with the desire to have more and more, thus forgetting that material goods are for all humanity and not only for this or that person.

The Church cannot involve itself directly in concrete political action, but it has the duty to pass judgment on equity and justice. Prophetic denouncement is the mission of the Church. The silence of the Church because of fear, opportunism or vanity arising from rubbing shoulders with the powerful is not the Church of the Beatitudes of the Reign of God.

The Church must be a light: announcing and denouncing to rich and poor is its mission. This mission is both an imperative and a duty. Its duty is to call on the rich and powerful not to be slaves of riches, not to forget the family of God to which they belong, and to remember that they administer their earthly goods as people who have brothers and sisters with the same rights to life and joy. It needs to say to the poor that they also are people -- free and children of God, and that they should never sell their souls and their liberty for pleasure or for bread; that they are brothers and sisters of all humanity and that they cannot, if they want to

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avoid humiliating themselves, give up their rights as children of God for a plate of beans or for “bread and circuses.” For Father Correia, the poor have a voice and they have the right and duty to shout out. The encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII and *Quadragesimo Anno* of Pius XI were both sources of inspiration and reflection for him.

The Right to Political Participation -- the Church in the Modern World

A problem as big as poverty could not be solved by individual initiatives alone. A public social and political initiative would be necessary. Such an initiative on the part of Christians could provide an extraordinary dynamism to force those responsible to resolve the problems.

The right of participation could not be ignored by Christians, who neglect a duty and disobey God when they place themselves at the edge of social and public life. It is as a citizen and in the name of temporal interests that the Christian cares efficiently for public life, and so is always ready to protest whenever rights are taken away. Whether a political viewpoint loses or is accepted, Christians will collaborate with their co-citizens, will support the demands made by life in society, will obey the laws and those who enforce the laws, in full consciousness that they are doing their duty and obeying God. In this way Father Alves Correia questioned the thinking of many Christians who, with a certain amount of anxiety, believed that their participation in the Reign of God was limited to the Church and didn't understand very well the earthly reality in which they lived. Christians in the Church and lost in the social, political and economic spheres, they frequently felt divided and tormented within. The human political and social undertaking is an affirmation of obedience to God, who, as Genesis states, commanded humanity to construct the world and civil society. The vocation of the Christian is to illuminate every earthly reality with the Gospel. Vatican II's pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) came very close to the thinking of Father Correia.

Human Conscience and Tolerance

This was a theme very dear to Father Correia, which he develops especially in his work entitled *Cadernos da Metanóia* (Metanóia Notebooks). The Church believes completely in the truth that it announces, but it does not impose it on anybody. In other times it was held that the Church could impose its doctrine. Alves Correia explained this point as follows: “*Jesus is not a master*

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who imposes blind obedience. He does not want followers whose consciences have been forced like subjugated slaves. He seeks decided and loving wills, disciples with open eyes who are transparent and sincere."

Human conscience demands respect because of convictions held. It is because of this sincerity and human freedom that the Good Shepherd gave his life so that they might be free; so that fear would not drown or kill the soul. It was to respect liberty of human conscience that Jesus did not refuse to die as a rebel, being perceived as a seducer of the crowds.

Human conscience is the voice of God in us; this voice demands that we respect our convictions. Conscience is our judge, even when it is wrong. If error does not have rights, the person who errs has rights. The only attack that we can direct towards such people is to try to convince them through dialogue and sharing. If we do not arrive at this point, we must respect such people because they have the same rights as us, because they, like us, must follow their consciences. If only the saints merit respect, even we might not gain such esteem. If we need to be good only to those who have the same ideas as we have, we would be like people who only love those who appeal to them. Intolerance and violence are the arms of the weak, of the short-sighted and of the selfish who wish to share their own shortcomings. Those who really believe in God love all people and respect their "divine rights."

*...defending a
conscientious stand that
we do not agree with...*

Tolerance is not a concession to the timidity of the orthodox ... it is an exercise of a fundamental right; the respect of human conscience, the respect for a person we think is wrong.

We Christians he said, must be the champions in defending a conscientious stand that we do not agree with and in our love of oppressed and downtrodden people, not because today democracy demands this, but because it would be hypocrisy to have the Gospel as our flag and be in accord with selfish and pride-filled tyrants.

Father Alves Correia -- Precursor of Vatican II

In the literary work of Father Alves Correia, we encounter a new way of dealing with some central themes in theology: the Reign of God and the Church, the Church in the world, the Church and its relationship with our separated brethren, and the Church and human rights. In a country which opposed the

right of free thinking, Alves Correia is one of the very few who rowed against the current with sensitivity for history and already defending the fundamental lines that Vatican II would support.

Some of the Father Alves Correia's thoughts that converge with Vatican II are as follows:

*...one of the very few
who rowed against the
current with sensitivity
for history...*

- The Reign of God is not identified with the Church -- it transcends the Church and embodies it as Father Correia held. The definition of Church by using the concepts of sign and sacrament of the Reign of God is found throughout *Lumen Gentium*.
- The mission of the Church in history and in the construction of the earthly kingdom is outlined in *Gaudium et Spes*. The Church in today's world was the focal point dominating Father Alves Correia's entire life.
- The articles he wrote in *Metanóia*, especially the work *A Consciência Cristã* (The Christian Conscience), defended ideas that Vatican II later consecrated in three decrees: the decree on religious liberty, the decree on ecumenism, and the declaration about the relationship of the Catholic Church with non-Christian religions.
- The renewal of the liturgy was another area that had his support. He was never comfortable with the use of Latin: "*What should be a live and dynamic school of illumination and fervor, what is the official catechetics - the Mass of the catechumens - has been converted by the abstruse official cultic language into a formalized memory of the sacred mystery. The faithful cannot say Amen when the living and pulsating language which is the mystery of God means nothing.*" For this reason, he published the *Missa dos Pequenos* (The Mass for Little Ones); *Cantai ao Senhor* (Sing to the Lord) with simple hymns in Portuguese and the *Manual de Oração* (The Prayer Manual), so that people could pray with greater ease; he also published a series of articles in the *Lumen* magazine.

*...was never comfortable
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Conclusion

Father Alves Correia possessed goodness and sensitivity and gave significant attention to the poor and the disinherited. Many of those who knew him tell numerous stories showing how he loved to welcome people and to share, giving away even what he needed. He lived between the two world wars, during the time of the Spanish civil war when poverty in Portugal was immense and the dictatorial regime was oppressive. His art as an attractive

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writer, his courage and his forthrightness made him unwanted in a country in which liberty was only a dream. Today he is seen as a precursor and is admired and remembered with nostalgia.

Endnotes

¹The quotations in this article are taken from Francisco Lopes, *P. Joaquim Alves Correia, ao serviço do Evangelho e da Democracia* Editora Rei dos Livros