



By JASON KEITH FERNANDES

Of Catholics in Goa, Germany, and Fascisms

Two recent statements, one by BJP's Goa spokesperson Nilesh Cabral, and the other by the IT Minister Rohan Khaunte, should chill Goans concerned about the health of the Goan polity. This is because it signals that critique of the government will not be tolerated by the present establishment, neither by the ruling party, nor by those supporting it.

Khaunte's argument was that Goans abroad seemed to have more to say about the dismal state of Goan politics than persons in the state. He subsequently clarified that his reproach to Goans criticising the Government was limited to those "who have given up Indian citizenship and have lost their love for Goa". As I have elaborated out elsewhere, it should be noted that Goans who have given up Indian citizenship have not done so voluntarily. Rather, they have been forced to do so by the Indian state which fails to recognise that Goans have a long history of Portuguese citizenship, and refuses to allow them to enjoy these older rights without giving up Indian citizenship. A concern for nuance and truth backed by a modicum of basic historical awareness is not, however, something that seems to bother these elected representatives.

This fact was amply demonstrated in Nilesh Cabral's ridiculous suggestions when responding to the article published in the *Renovação* prior to the by-elections in Pangim and Valpoi. Cabral is reported to have suggested that Nazi-era Germany was 90 to 100 per cent Catholic, and that Nazism was supported by the Catholic Church. In a stronger democracy, where the statements of elected representatives are held to account, Cabral would have been laughed out of the room, and even probably asked to resign his position not only for misrepresentation, but for statements intended to provoke mischief. But then India has long stopped being a democracy one can take seriously.

A basic familiarity with the history of Christianity will demonstrate that the territories that would eventually come together as Germany have had a problematic relationship with Catholicism. It was in Wittenberg, now in Germany but then within the ambit of the Holy Roman Empire, that Martin Luther, at the time also a Catholic, commenced his critique of the Catholic Church. This act led to a series of incidents culminating with warfare within the

Empire. The consequent Peace of Augsburg (1555) made peace between Catholic and Protestant princes, compelling subjects to follow the faith of the ruler. The Empire was no longer a single Catholic bloc. Of Catholics in Goa, Germany, and Fascisms

A united Germany was only formed in 1871 when Otto von Bismarck, the Minister President of the kingdom of Prussia, declared King Wilhelm I of Prussia also King of Germany. Bismarck, who was Chancellor of this new German empire, had a relationship with the Catholic Church which was far from amicable. Politicians like Bismarck, who sought to build strong nation-states with power over all society, saw the assertions of the Catholic Church, which not only raised moral objections to the claims of the nation-states but also offered alternative ways in which to view the world and create socio-political communities, as a hindrance to their plans. It should be pointed out that, just as in Goa, Catholics formed a small (approximately 35 %) but dominant minority within the German empire. Bismarck thus, aided the Kulturkampf (1871-78), an attack on the Catholic Church and community in Germany, which presented German Catholics as the internal enemy to the incipient German nation.

It is in the context of the Kulturkampf, and the manner in which the state asserted a right to control education, that a Concordat was signed between the Vatican, represented by Cardinal Pacelli (later to be Pope Pius XII) and the Nazi regime in 1933. The Concordat which demarcated the rights and powers between the two entities allowed for the Catholic Church to have control over the management of the affairs of the church. It is largely this Concordat that lies at the heart of accusations that the Catholic Church supported the Nazi regime.

While not excusing the manner in which many groups (Catholic and Protestant) that offered resistance to the Nazi regime were effectively abandoned by the Vatican's policy to obtain the Concordat, one needs to recognise that the Vatican does not represent the entirety of the Catholic community in any region. This community includes the Catholic hierarchy in the region, the clergy, religious groups, and various communities and groups of individuals who confess Catholicism. The Catholics in any one territory, therefore, are composed of multiple groups and it is this complexity that one needs to recognise when making charges against "Catholics". Shifting our understanding of the term "Catholics" from a monolithically represented community and recognising the diversity within this group allows us to see that, while there were Catholic supporters of the Nazi regime, both clerical and lay, the hierarchy of bishops in Germany were not only wary but also offered resistance to the regime, as did

many other Catholics, both as individuals and groups. The Vatican itself, notably through the voice of Pius XI in his encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* (1937), raised concerns about the manner in which the Nazi regime was violating the Concordat, as well as raised moral objections to the regime's discourse and practice. The Nazi regime itself continued the earlier German state's hostility to the Catholic Church.

To accuse the Catholic Church, and Catholics, of supporting Nazism in such a context is to make a statement that is irresponsible and oneous. In many ways, the article in the *Renovação*, as well as the decision by its editorial body to print the article, is similar to the opposition of the Catholic hierarchy and laity to German fascism. For this heroism in continuing to speak truth to power, Catholics and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Goa need to be commended and one hopes that they will continue this opposition by coupling it with deeper philosophical and historical insight.

This insight may also point out the ecclesiastical errors committed in Nazi Germany that could be avoided here. More recently the Archbishop Patriarch of Goa is alleged to have acknowledged that the role of the ecclesiastical authorities dealing with the contested sales of various properties, especially that on the island of Vanxim, while morally wrong, was legally correct. Such a response smacks of the same kind of positivist and legalistic thinking that guided the Curia and Cardinal Pacelli in the conclusion of the Concordat with Germany. It also runs counter to the ideal leadership that has systematically been demonstrated by Pope Francis in recent times. All too often, the Catholic faithful are reminded that we must be careful in our critiques of members and leaders of the Catholic community because it only strengthens the hands of the enemy. This is true. As such, it is doubly binding on the leadership to examine their own behaviour, even as they continue to be the voice of truth in a polluted polity.

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