

## A Remnant Book Review...

## A Patriot for Portugal

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In September 1968, there came to a sad and humiliating close one of the most remarkable – and, on the whole, beneficent – political reigns which the modern world can disclose. António de Oliveira Salazar, who had been Portugal's Prime Minister since 1932 and its most powerful man since 1928, had experienced a series of increasingly incapacitating strokes which rendered unthinkable his continuation in office. Yet when he died in July 1970, mourners came in their tens of thousands to attend his Requiem Mass, at Lisbon's Jerónimos monastery. Videotaped footage of the occasion survives.

It might be assumed (particularly given the amount of English-language comment which Salazar's rule inspired in its earlier stages) that over the succeeding four decades much solid research might have been published regarding so long a term in office. The assumption would be wrong. Few Westerners know the Portuguese language; and those who do know it are, on the whole, those least likely to consider Salazar worth analyzing. Without fluency in Portuguese it is simply impossible to make sense of the plethora of archives which Salazar's leadership generated, he being the sort of administrator who compulsively minuted, and often responded on the same day to, every paper that crossed his desk.

Consequently we have had to wait till now for an adequate – or any – book in English which deals with Salazar's life as a whole. Still, the contrasting example of Spanish politics suggests that this silence might not have been altogether a bad thing. Modern Portuguese history has at least avoided the malicious distortions by which lachrymose Marxist Paul Preston – in an everlasting tantrum at the fate of his gallant church-burning nun-raping Spanish Red friends after the Civil War – has lately brought the chronicling of General Franco's career into permanent disrepute. Within the first few pages of *Salazar: A Political Biography* [Enigma Books, New York City, 2009, 644 pages], Filipe Ribeiro De Meneses (Senior Lecturer in Modern History at the National University of Ireland in Maynooth, west of Dublin) proclaims himself to be, unlike the egregious Preston, a genuine scholar. Though readers will soon suspect that Dr. Meneses does not himself much like Salazar or Salazar's religion, he tries with his whole being to be scrupulously fair; and his footnotes – which sometimes occupy five-eighths of a page – are an education in themselves.

Born in 1889 to a poor landowning family in the country's north, Salazar originally trained for the priesthood, like so many other intelligent youths blocked from the armed forces by reasons of health and temperament. Even after he had abandoned the seminary life in order to teach political economy at the University of Coimbra, he kept the priestly habits of austerity, quietude, and hard work.

Dr. Meneses has demonstrated that whilst Salazar's early political activity was more devoted than he later wished biographers to believe, it remained singularly unsatisfying, not least for himself.

Only after a 1926 military coup ended the anarchy which had prevailed ever since the overthrow of Portugal's King Manuel II, 16 years earlier, did Salazar have a hope of political influence. And only in 1928 did he achieve the all-important post of Finance Minister. Given quasi-dictatorial powers to slash bureaucratic spending, he actually turned, within a year, an endless budget deficit into a small budget surplus. This surplus he recapitulated annually until World War II.

Closer in spirit to Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* than to the little tin gods of Manchester liberalism, Salazar modified textbook economics with bold strokes, as when he took Portugal off the gold standard because Britain had broken the gold-sterling link. But his frugality and incorruptibility, in addition to sparing Portugal the Great Depression, won for his country abroad a respect it had never known since the days of Vasco da Gama. Salazar's Ambassador to Britain, Armando Monteiro, wrote: "I was used, when abroad, to having my country treated as a 'quantité négligeable' and my condition of being Portuguese seen with the vague irony reserved for the Siamese or the Malagasy." No more. Salazar's New State (*Estado Novo*) stood out like a beacon for those in Europe who detested communism, but who had no love for capitalism; who – even if sympathetic to Mussolini the man, as Salazar initially was – distrusted the invocations to brute force so routine with Italian Fascism; and who feared Hitlerite paganism.

Possibly Salazar owed his sustained triumph to his character's un-Portuguese elements. Christian de Caters, a French visitor to Lisbon, wrote in 1940:

"They [Salazar's compatriots] are unstable and changeable, not out of cunning, but from an instability which is fundamental... They make a promise, on the generous impulse of the moment, but they do not always remember to keep it. The moment you suggest a scheme, they sparkle with enthusiasm. 'Don't worry; it shall be done.' This is Portugal all over. But when? Not just this moment. Tomorrow, perhaps, or next month. Perhaps never."

It would be difficult to think of any features more totally alien to Salazar than the ones here described. Even (or especially) Salazar's most embittered foes acknowledged his gift for realism, a gift more frequent in Spain, it must be said, than in Portugal. Had Cervantes been Portuguese we would certainly have had Don Quixote, but we would probably never have had Sancho Panza.

Dr. Meneses' title is appropriate, in that despite Salazar's stupendously well documented political life, mystery attaches to his private life. He may, or may not, have had a secret love affair in the 1940s, and another with French interviewer Christine

Garnier during the 1950s (Mlle. Garnier certainly fell for *him* from a great height). The probability is that carnal relationships never occurred, since had there been solid reasons for taxing Salazar the publicly renowned ascetic with hypocrisy, we would have heard all about them, not so much from the Portuguese Communist Party itself as from Moscow's adherents in the West. (During 1962 the following libel appeared in Britain's *Observer*: "Portugal is not a music-hall joke but a police state every bit as brutal and corrupt as Nazi Germany [italics added].")

Equally obscure must be Salazar's own heritage. The notion that he possessed Hebraic forebears – the surname De Oliveira commonly occurred among Portugal's 16<sup>th</sup>-century *conversos* – was publicized in 1940 by a discontented and Jew-baiting monarchist. This monarchist, seething at Salazar's refusal to restore the Bragança dynasty (the *Estado Novo* never definitively rejected such a restoration, but, equally, never brought it about), wanted the Prime Minister expelled from office. Perhaps Salazar's bookishness, dry humor, pedagogical approach to intellectual inferiors, and power of conveying unworlly detachment bespoke Jewish blood. Perhaps not. Probably we shall never know for sure.

By 1945 the *Estado Novo* had actually attained a stronger position than it had enjoyed before the war. Salazar's combination of strict foreign-policy neutralism in public with undoubted sympathy for Britain in private had ensured that he never gave to fortune the hostage that Franco proffered, in the shape of the Spanish Blue Division on the Russian front. An attempt (anarchist rather than Bolshevik in origin) on Salazar's life in 1937 had, fortunately, failed; but it had confirmed, for all to witness, the cool courage that its intended victim displayed when confronted with threats to his person.

Non-Communist left-wing opposition to the *Estado Novo* was faction-infested, impotent, mostly in self-imposed exile, and still smarting from the awareness that it had botched its chances of efficient governance between 1910 and 1926. The Communist Party, after its wartime organization of strikes had failed to drive Salazar from power, had lost heart (though it would later regain enthusiasm) and, in any event, operated under the disadvantage of a ban on its existence. Meanwhile an extreme right-wing group of so-called National Syndicalists – which, led by one Rolão Preto, openly boasted that it would do to the Prime Minister what Austrian Nazis did to Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss – had been crushed in the mid-1930s.

Two political problems for Salazar continued, and are indicated by Dr. Meneses. Elements in the army, from the start, resented the idea of a mere professor ordering them around (although for as long



António de Oliveira Salazar

as the country's long-time President, Oscar Carmona, gave Salazar full support, they could do little or nothing about it). And Salazar, by Portuguese society's inherent nature, lacked anything like the depth of civilian expertise that other heads of government had at their disposal.

Marcelo Caetano – a fellow academic, and Salazar's eventual successor in the Prime Minister's role – had more talent and brains than his rivals in the administration. Alas, he nagged Salazar so relentlessly as to be something of a trial, and had in full measure the legalistic penchant for asking (in the famous old joke's words): "This seems all right in practice, but will it work in theory?". Ultimately, it must be said, he remained loyal to his boss. After Salazar's political life had ended, Caetano's first public speech paid him a handsome tribute: "This country has been accustomed for a long time to being governed by a man of genius; today it must adapt to government by common men."

From the late 1950s Salazar needed to adopt brinkmanship unknown to him in the palmier days of yore. Humberto Delgado, a voluble lightweight with delusions of competence, had switched from strident quasi-fascism to equally strident defenses of parliamentary democracy, in neither mode inspiring Salazar's trust. When Delgado decided to be a candidate at the 1958 presidential election, he told a reporter of what he would do to Salazar: "Obviously, I'll get rid of him." He lost the resultant poll, and ballot-box fraud undeniably took place. For this, Salazar may be legitimately criticized. Nevertheless, since the same Western reporters who execrated such fraud maintained a complete and virtuous silence at the unmistakable vote-stealing effected on behalf of John F. Kennedy two years afterward, it is hard to take their moralism seriously. (The extracts which Dr. Meneses quotes from the leading British and American broadsheets recall nothing so much – in their authors' obvious desire to make Portugal ungovernable – as the famed *National Review* cartoon where a gloating Fidel Castro announces: "I got my job through *The New York Times*!")

In 1965 Delgado and his secretary were murdered under circumstances which, even after Dr. Meneses' attempts to explain them, are still arcane. Leftist

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opinion naturally accused Salazar of the killings, but Salazar had never previously been in the habit of suppressing opponents by violence. It is far likelier that rogue elements in the national security service (the PIDE) acted on their own initiative. Since Delgado had long outlived his usefulness to the Communist Party—which openly mocked him as “the Coca-Cola General”—we cannot rule out the possibility that individual Communists made themselves, at the very least, into accomplices of the crime. (The PIDE’s interrogating techniques, however regrettable on occasion, were amateur-hour stuff compared with Abu Ghraib’s systematic imposition of torture and sexual shame. Moreover, Salazar’s subjects enjoyed a personal freedom unimaginable in today’s English-speaking lands. Had Salazar attempted to ban smoking in cafés, or to criminalize via “hate speech” laws any unfavorable descriptions of nonwhites, he would have been consigned to the nearest mental home.)

A bigger threat to Salazar than the glib Delgado resided in the Kennedy Administration, with its members’ flow charts and mission statements and position papers and general “armed cant” about The New Frontier. It might have been thought that JFK would at least take Salazar’s anti-communism seriously, since anti-communism came about as near to a serious passion as Kennedy ever felt; but whereas Salazar conceived of anti-communism as a consistent philosophy (honed on thinkers as diverse as Charles Maurras and Pius XI), Kennedy thought of it in terms of adolescent dreams about hiring CIA spooks to bump off Castro with an exploding cigar. Inevitably interactions between Washington and Lisbon became a dialogue of the deaf. Kennedy sneered at Angola, Mozambique, and other Portuguese territories as “Portugal’s second five-hundred-year plan for Africa.” Salazar may nonetheless be judged to have won the duel with JFK, since he at least escaped the fate of another Catholic, anti-Communist ruler: South Vietnam’s Ngo Dinh Diem, butchered alongside his brother in 1963 with the White House’s connivance. (This act elicited from President Diem’s sister-in-law Madame Nhu an observation as accurate as it was scathing: “Whoever has the Americans as allies does not need enemies.”) Mercifully, Lyndon Johnson gave Portugal no particular trouble, committed as he was to his own hubristic vision of “the Great Society on the Mekong.” Salazar, asked what he thought of LBJ, responded:

That he is a good man. For a country that seeks to direct all of international politics being a good man is not enough. One must know in depth the history, the culture, the politics of Europe, of Asia, of Africa. The presidents of the United States do not know them.

By the time one president who did know them—Richard Nixon—arrived in the Oval Office, Salazar had been forced into retirement. It is a shame that he could

not have benefited from Nixon’s long-overdue *Realpolitik*.

In the absence of such an ally as Nixon, Salazar coped well enough, as when the issue of Rhodesian independence erupted during late 1965. Aged seventy-six, he could still administer a snub to Harold Wilson, who the previous year had won Britain’s Prime Ministry in a photograph, and who probably thought of himself as sincerely trying to help. Salazar had been studying Aquinas on just-war theory when Wilson had been a babe in arms; and without using a single phrase more offensive than the terminology of a traffic report, he managed to leave Wilson with the distinct—not to say truthful—impression of being a boy sent to do a man’s job. Maybe Salazar should have resigned at that point, rather than stay at his post for almost three more years. His short-term memory had begun to fade before the diagnosis of his first stroke; and a 1967 sex scandal which involved under-age trafficking (one Italian newspaper headline actually used the word “Lolita”) compelled the Justice Minister’s resignation, although even the *Estado Novo*’s harshest foreign critics dared not imply involvement by Salazar himself.

Anyhow, Salazar clung on. Once his physique had so deteriorated that he could no longer cling on, Caetano—whom President Américo Tomás chose as Salazar’s successor—did as well as could be expected. (It indicates how completely the Braganças had slipped from view by 1968 that the concept of a return to monarchy, such as Spain would carry out with the Bourbons upon Franco’s eventual death, never once troubled Portuguese politicians’ calculations.) Tomás took the fatal decision to hide from Salazar the news that he had lost office, though from various utterances that Salazar let drop, one gathers that he remained sufficiently shrewd to suspect most, if not all, of the concealment practiced. The form that Caetano’s (and Tomás’s) downfall took is all too well known: a *coup d’état* in April 1974, with sincere non-Communists serving as front men for the apparat; the swift disposal of these non-Communists as soon as they had become expendable; Communist rule of Portugal during 1975, under the thinnest of parliamentary disguises; an eventual reaction against this rule, and the Communists’ surrendering of executive command, always provided that their control over universities and television (in other words, over the *real power centers*) remained intact. Portugal thereby turned into what it is now: another province of post-Christendom, with serious Catholic or even serious non-Catholic Christianity forever off the agenda, and with the extermination of unborn children finally legalized in 2007.

These comments take the story beyond Dr. Meneses’ narrative, which ends with Salazar’s own demise. A few faults may be found in this narrative. Salazar’s wish to put himself in a good light is described as if it were an evil almost unique to him, instead of something that every Prime Minister and every President and every State Governor and every Mayor of

Oshkosh, Nebraska, has exhibited, usually with much more blatancy than Salazar ever bothered to attempt. Moreover, a greater emphasis on the religious elements in Salazar’s rule—more especially official encouragement of devotion to Fatima—would have been welcome. However intense the government’s Fatima championship, Portugal seems never, under Salazar, to have been a *strictly* confessional state of the Franco sort. Salazar himself harbored none of Franco’s personal resentment toward Freemasons, who included in their number several high-ranking Portuguese politicians, Carmona among them.

Such carping should not unduly detract from Dr. Meneses’ feat. Into any chrestomathy of modern European traditionalism, sentence after sentence of Salazar’s disenchanted credo could, with profit, be incorporated. From a 1948 speech:

There are no eternal regimes, there are no perfect regimes, there are no universal regimes. There are no eternal regimes, but there are stable and unstable regimes; there are no perfect regimes; but there are those that render their nations a service and those that render a disservice; there are no universal regimes, but there are those that take into consideration, and those that ignore, the particular circumstances and the universality of the human factor.

This from the 1930s:

We do not ask for much. An understanding and consciousness of the Fatherland and of national unity; of the family, the primary social unit; of authority and of obedience to authority; of the spiritual values of life and of the respect that is owing to man; of the obligation to labor; of virtue and of the sacred nature of religion—that is what is essential in the mental and moral formation of a citizen of the *Estado Novo*.

And this from 1961, when the “wind of change” gleefully predicted by British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan had begun blowing with a vengeance:

The United Nations are no more than a field for demagoguery to flourish. There, a field of newborn countries, which have no tradition, no real structure, and no soul, incessantly desire to give lessons to, and even admonish, the most ancient nations of the West, the legitimate guardians of civilization.

Other than Franco, the European leaders most readily comparable with Salazar among his approximate contemporaries were Charles De Gaulle and Eamon De Valera. Whilst De Gaulle’s second and more convincing accession to power occurred in peaceful circumstances (unlike Franco’s), his subsequent presidency suffered from the fact that in his betrayal of *Algérie Française*, he helped make that “decolonizing” desert which the masochistic pagan West called peace. As for De Valera, he had something of Salazar’s monkishness, and much of Salazar’s sheer political longevity, but little of Salazar’s intellectual vigor, and nothing of Salazar’s physical fortitude, as he demonstrated with his erratic behavior

amid the Easter Rising.

The flaws which this book reveals in Salazar’s personality mean no more than the fact—already well attested, one might have thought, though perhaps worth stressing in the age of Obama—that Salazar did not share the Virgin Mary’s Immaculate Conception and failed even to achieve the lesser rank of an archangel. Overall, the fairest summation of Salazar’s performance may be found in the verdict which Ben Jonson passed on Shakespeare: “[H]e redeemed his vices with his virtues. There was ever more in him to be praised than to be pardoned.”

Catholic testimony to what Salazar managed is, or at least was, abundant. Non-Catholic testimony might thus deserve more elaborate quotation. The following comes from an Orthodox priest, Fr. James Thornton, writing in *The New American* (October 13, 1999), commented:

He [Salazar] never sought personal enrichment, but lived a life of simplicity, dying a poor man after 40 years of public service ... while many of the institutions created by Dr. Salazar have disappeared, the principles which gave them substance and meaning spring from universal and absolute truths, and therefore cannot be extinguished.

During the Eisenhower Presidency Sir Walter Crocker, an Australian diplomat of Protestant upbringing who appears never to have considered becoming a Catholic, found that when he moved from New York to Lisbon “I felt as if I were going from a noisome prison out into the morning air in the countryside.” He went on (in his memoirs *Australian Ambassador*, Melbourne University Press, 1971):

After the [New York] clangor and tension, and so many faces taut or ugly or vicious, life in Portugal might be unaffluent but it was still quiet, still kindly, still human. The lack of development and the poverty struck one as a blessing. The absence of advertisers and of mass media men and of vote-catching politicians, bawling out their meretricious wares, was like relief from the presence of the demented.

Most Anglophone intellectuals have so completely internalized the two-party system (which the late *Chronicles* columnist Samuel Francis called “the Stupid Party and the Evil Party”) as to be incapable of comprehending Salazar’s world-view.

To them, let this be said: that in the very year 1968 there remained one ruler who, by his industry and conscientiousness, kept his land from the talons of Maoists, drug barons, judicial activists, femocrats, sexologists, pornographers, sodomites, abortionists, and Wall Street bankers. As a result, literally millions among his subjects could rear their children in the Christian spirit of “wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord.”

Since this success is manifestly beyond any Western politicians in 2010 (and beyond none more obviously than those who now have the impudence to call themselves “conservatives”), can it be wondered at that this book’s final—and undubitably unintended—effect is to induce an overwhelming nostalgia? ■