

The perception of religious freedom as a social representation of the legal framework

Paulo Mendes Pinto

Un. Lusófona, Lisbon, Portugal

1. The Portuguese legal framework

During a great part of the twentieth century, the Portuguese legal texts affirmed the Catholic nature of national identity. The dictatorial regime started in 1932, using the Catholic Church, formulated a mental picture of strengthening the state itself and the regime.

The review of the 1971 Constitution stated also very clearly this relationship:

Art. 45 - Free is the cult of Catholic religion, private or public, as a religion of the Portuguese nation. [...].

Art. 46 - The Roman Catholic religion is considered as the traditional religion of the Portuguese nation.

The 1974 Revolution and the Constitution adopted the following year, have created a legal framework for full religious freedom.

The post-revolution constitution has simplified the relations between the State and religious denominations. In its Part I: "Fundamental rights and duties", Title I: "General principles", Article 13 (Principle of equality), point 2, the question is clearly put:

No one shall be privileged, favored, prejudiced, deprived of any right or exempted from any duty because of ancestry, sex, race, language, place of origin, religion, political or ideological beliefs, education, economic situation or social condition.

In Article 41 (Freedom of conscience, religion and worship), the law goes to include all religions, leaving the idea of a traditional religion.

But the religious diversity in Portugal was very insignificant. Some religious groups developed some civic intervention in the field of social work. But, even in this field, they accepted a place where they were allowed to a relationship increasingly similar to the relationship of the state with the dominant confession.

The Religious Freedom Act, approved in 2001, remained a place apart for the Catholic Church, however affirming the full Religious Freedom.

2. More than laws, mentalities

In fact, today in we have in Portugal a legal framework for Religious Freedom. More, we have a good relationship between religions and the state, with many dialogue activities, among religions and between them and the state.

The religious leaders are unanimous in affirming this climate of religious freedom and institutional cooperation. For example, on the first day of presidency, the current Portuguese President went to the Lisbon Mosque to a ceremony held with more than 20 religious leaders.

But what interests us is the perception of Freedom. We have a legal framework that affirms and guarantees freedom, but as it is recognized, perceived by citizens?

In Portuguese culture we have a "common place": we are tolerant. But "tolerate" is a word that denotes something wrong. In religion should be intolerable tolerate.

I am not saying that this traditional view of Portuguese culture is wrong. But it's not correct. It is much more complex than simply: we are tolerante. We need to look at social groups and try to understand how they treat this self-representation.

3. Survey on perception of Religious Freedom - the leaders of the evangelical communities

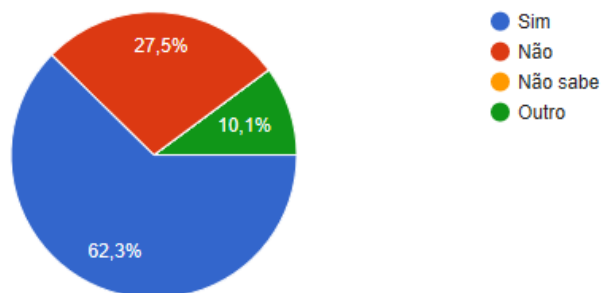
I will present, in first hand, the results of a very recent survey. I have just received the first results here in the Utah.

As I said, the national religious leaders affirm the existence of religious freedom, and collaborate regularly in dialogue activities. This position is so clear and solid, that we decided to see what thought the leaders of local communities.

Local leaders are those who are in contact with the communities. They are what can help us to realize that, in fact, feel the communities on Religious Freedom.

Question 1:

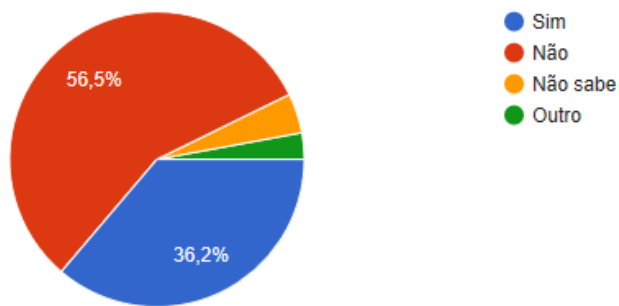
Portuguese society is religiously tolerant?



In relation to this question, with focus in the "national mythology", we saw that many accept this idea, but little more than the most part. It is not an absolute truth.

Question 2:

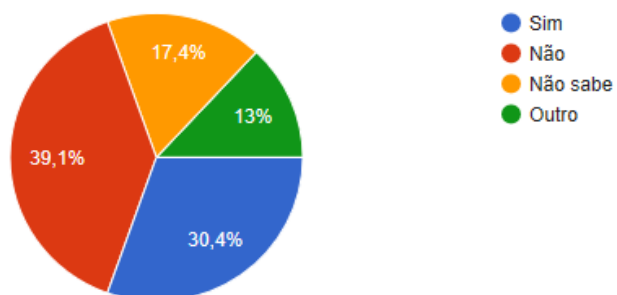
The Portuguese Religious Freedom Law guarantee the religious freedom?



This second question is consistent with the perception, representation of the Religious Freedom Law. The leaders say the law is perfect Local leaders say the opposite. Simple.

Question 3:

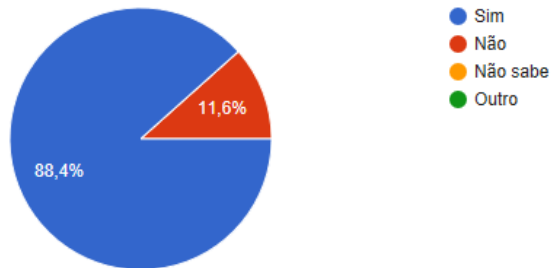
Religious communities encourage dialogue between religions?



In this question, we are looking for the approach to the communities themselves. Encourage dialogue? Fewer than half say yes, that communities encourage dialogue.

Question 4:

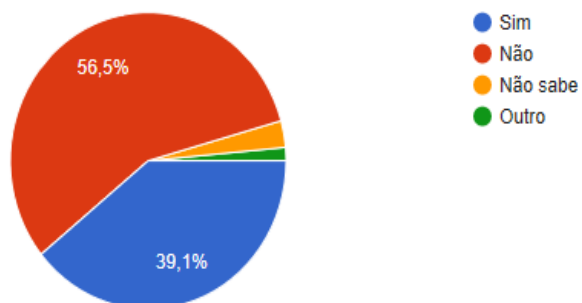
Your religious community has organized an activity with other denominations?



Going deeper. Yes, most communities have performed activities with other denominations, ie Christians. But, and with other religions?

Question 5:

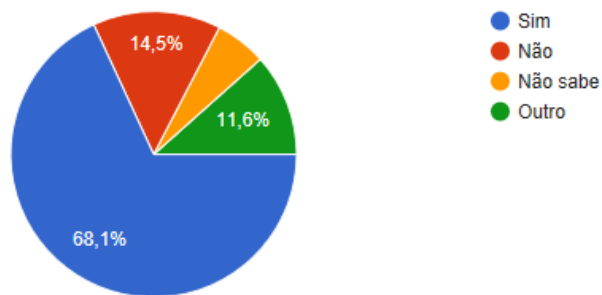
Your religious community has organized an activity with other religions?



The situation changes radically. Most evangelical communities never realized any activity with other religions.

Question 6:

Are you in favor of interfaith dialogue



However, most of the leaders are in favor of interreligious dialogue. But it is only about 70%

Finishing

The Religious Freedom is a changing reality, according to the developments and challenges of the world.

Is not only the legal framework that guarantees the Religious Freedom. It is a fundamental principle, but we need to learn how to work with the mentalities and, then, create respect, not tolerance.