

COMMENDATION SPEECH BY PROF. JÓNATAS E. M. MACHADO, DEAN, FACULTY OF LAW, UNIVERSITY OF COIMBRA

Political Economy, Freedom And The Common Good Tribute to Professor Manuel Carlos Lopes Porto

I had the honour of being a student of Professor Manuel Carlos Lopes Porto in the discipline of Political Economy, in the first year of the undergraduate course. And it is with equal feeling that I dare to pay this simple tribute to this distinguished Professor of the Faculty of Law of Coimbra, who has earned wide admiration and esteem, nationally and internationally. I can say that having been a student of Professor Manuel Porto was an unforgettable and remarkable experience in all my education, for which I am very grateful. I am sure that he had a structuring and inspiring impact on the lives and thinking of several generations of students before and after mine, as well as on the academic community to which he belonged and on the life of our country.

This distinguished professor was characterized by a broad political and economic culture, a dizzying speed of reasoning and rigorous and sharp statements, always surrounded by a friendly, pleasant and well-disposed speech. At that time, there were still times of some ideological upheaval in Portugal. The Carnation Revolution had taken place less than a decade ago. The country was still looking for its democratic and social path in an international climate marked by the Cold War and the gradual affirmation of the process of European integration. Political and economic discussions, although less intense

than a few years before, took place and ran through the corridors of the Faculty and in the most varied spaces of conviviality, and were also characterized by ideological polemics and, in some cases, by personal acrimony.

At the Faculty of Law of Coimbra, the existence of different tendencies was noticeable, between those who defended a planned economy and those who believed that the free market was the solution to all problems. Among the professors the atmosphere was at the time a little more unclouded, correcting the excesses experienced during the revolutionary period. Professor Manuel Porto's various assistants were entirely allowed to give free rein to their political and economic thinking in practical classes, thus painting a varied and colourful mosaic of concepts and ideas, stimulating the scientific curiosity and critical capacity of the students.

In this context, Professor Manuel Porto's classes were culturally interesting and intellectually stimulating, able to familiarize students with the complex mechanisms that govern the economy. It was obvious that he did not believe in the constructive power of the so-called revolution of the proletariat or in the possibility of building a classless society where, as Karl Marx dreamed, man could devote himself to hunting in the morning, to fishing in the afternoon, and to criticism before going to bed. This does not mean that the social critique of the materialist dialectic was ignored and the injustices of the productive system were devalued.

In fact, it also did not seem clear to us that Professor Manuel Porto was willing to take the forces of the free market to their ultimate consequences, as advocated by authors such as Milton Friedman or Richard Posner, with the inherent risks of commodification of manifestly non-economic magnitudes. Nevertheless, at that time the American political and economic model was still very appealing, capturing the attention of the most sceptical intellectuals about communism and socialism, given the very positive contribution

that the United States had made to the victory over the forces of totalitarianism and the reconstruction of Europe after World War II.

Even so, Professor Manuel Porto's approach was always very rich and open to nuance. From him we learnt the virtues of John Maynard Keynes's counter-cyclical policies in combating economic depressions and recessions, through public investment, job creation and the stimulation of aggregate demand. We have also been alerted to authors such as John Kenneth Galbraith and his scepticism about the economic power of large multinational corporations and the technostucture they nurture over the political system, prices, consumption, the competitive market and workers' rights, including trade union rights and collective bargaining. For the students, it was increasingly clear that the State should assume an important role in the economy and society, with investments in infrastructure, health and education and regulatory interventions to correct market failures. Economic equilibrium and social justice could not be dependent on the free play of individual and collective interests and selfishness.

Professor Manuel Porto was also always attentive to the problem of economic integration at the global and regional level. His family connections to India naturally linked him to the thinking and concerns of economists such as Amartya Sen and Jagdish Bagwati. Both of them, in their own way, and despite the public divergences that characterized their relationship, were concerned with the creation of political, institutional, social and economic conditions that would favour development, growth and social justice, at the national level and on a planetary scale. Building on the thought of Adam Smith and David Ricardo, duly revised and corrected, these economists problematized the liberalization of world trade from the theory of comparative advantages, through the gradual elimination of state subsidies to production and customs barriers and measures of equivalent effect, with the aim of facilitating the free movement and exchange of goods and services at the international level.

Dr. Manuel Porto entered into this discussion, deeply studying the theories of economic integration and advocating a greater opening of the world economy. However, without ever being naïve to the point of closing his eyes to the risks of deindustrialisation, excessive dependence on the outside, unfair competition and economic and social inequality. These risks may be responsible for the setbacks we are currently witnessing, with the return of protectionism and even the declared trade war, in a geopolitical framework that generates the greatest perplexity.

An unconditional supporter of European integration, to which he was personally committed as a Member of the European Parliament, Professor Manuel Porto closely followed Portugal's accession to the European project, the deepening of the internal market, the creation of the European Union and the flourishing of European citizenship. Over several decades, his thinking seemed to be ideologically closer to the tradition of Christian democracy and the social market economy to which names such as Walter Eucken, Ludwig Erhard and Konrad Adenauer are linked, which emerged indelibly linked to the so-called German economic miracle and which would eventually be expressly enshrined in the Treaty on European Union.

At stake is an economic model that seeks to combine, in a dynamic and socially attentive way, a free but regulated market, the promotion of welfare policies and income redistribution, the participation of workers in the management and profits of companies, and monetary and fiscal stability. In the European Union, its fundamental pillars are the freedoms of movement of people, companies, goods, services and capital and competition. In addition, it is subordinated to the principles of respect for fundamental rights, democracy, the rule of law, and is duly framed by the seven European institutions and multiple bodies and agencies, some of them with an economically and socially relevant regulatory function.

In this model, the free market continues to be a driving force of

the economy, promoting efficiency in the allocation of resources and competition in the production and distribution of goods and services. However, it is at no time an end in itself or the lord to whom everyone must pay allegiance. On the contrary, the market is understood as a means to achieve various ends. Not being a master, he must be a serf, ensuring free economic initiative, contractual freedom, the right to private property – including the means of production – and the flow of production. It allows the general population access to the most varied consumer goods, in quantity and with considerable levels of quality and innovation.

But the market is always limited by other values, such as the rights of workers and consumers, public health, the environment, cultural heritage or spatial planning. Although he was not a fan of the free and unregulated market, Professor Manuel Porto did not fail to warn of the risk that excessive interventionism and regulatory and bureaucratic complexity, legitimized by these models, could gradually become embedded in the political and economic systems, petrifying the economy and threatening its ability to adapt and innovate. Hence, perhaps, his preference for the market.

Perhaps because I myself was raised in this environment, I soon sensed the Christian roots of Professor Manuel Porto's political and economic thought, something that I was able to confirm later when I learned of his ecclesial involvement. His constant concern for dignity, freedom, justice and equity was based on the intimate assimilation of an entire tradition based on the proclamation of the duty of care towards the most vulnerable – the poor, orphans, widows and foreigners – in the awareness that true religion must pass through one's neighbour towards God and men. Economic thought recognizes the material needs of the human being, since he is also body and community, but it always keeps in mind the biblical truth that man does not live by bread alone, but that he projects himself on the horizon of a spiritual and eternal reality that gives meaning and purpose to his earthly and finite existence.

In this collection of ideals, values and principles resided the critical instance that led Professor Manuel Porto to renounce a materialist vision of the world and of life, to reject political and economic totalitarianism and to look attentively and vigilantly at the market and international trade, lest one or the other become factors of indignity, injustice and extreme inequality. The economic system should establish relations of close substantive relationship with the political and legal systems, in order to provide the full and balanced realization of the individual and collective aspirations of human existence.

Professor Manuel Porto always sought to defend, above all, the common good, a very important concept in Christian social thought. This essentially consists of the thoughtful and harmonious protection of individual and collective interests, without ever slipping into individualism or collectivism. For Professor Manuel Porto, in line with what Adam Smith already advocated, the economy must be dynamized and regulated based on moral feelings of empathy and sharing in the social context and ethical principles of honesty in dealing, fairness in contracts and prices and respect for the dignity of the human person, without slipping into manipulation, predation, exploitation and exclusion of the poorest.

Manuel Porto always had in mind a more humane and solidary vision of economic and commercial integration, having in his Christian roots critical points of support that allowed him to face the human being and society in a frankly optimistic way, but always realistic and critical, never naïve. To honour Professor Manuel Porto, as is fair and due, is also to honour the values and principles that he represents and has always defended.

Jónatas E. M. Machado

Dean of the Faculty of Law of the University of Coimbra