



TOWARDS A CHRISTIAN POLITICS IN INDIA: INVESTIGATING THE BIBLICAL AND ECCLESIAL

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Introduction

Political theology usually gains few or minimum space in the curriculum and symposiums of Catholic theological centres in India. In Christian colleges and universities abroad this is, however, a topic of hot discussion and serious study. But now, here also the topic is gaining momentum. This is a recent development and it is not without reasons. India the world's biggest democracy and the most diverse country in the world in terms of ethnicity, language and religion is right now going through a very critical period. The political situation in India is changing fast. Ethnic, linguistic and religious diversities seem to be losing grounds here. Despotism seems to be on wheels. Mobocracy seemingly gains upper hand over democracy.

We the Catholic theologians engage with this topic not only because we are Indian citizens, but also because we are Indian Christians. This article attempts to propose a Christian politics that is urgently needed in this crucial moment of Indian democracy. We are aware of our limitations. But that should not hinder us from discharging our responsibilities and playing our role in the society. This article is divided



into three parts. The first part is an attempt to make a political reading of the Bible. The second part tries to expose the ecclesial stands on politics in general and the third part focuses on the specific features of a Christian politics in the contemporary Indian scenario.

1. The Bible and Politics

The Bible contains the salvation history and it is written from a faith perspective. However, a political reading of it is possible since the salvation history itself involves various concrete political situations and events. In a sense, we can say that salvation history is not immune from political history. The political history within the Bible makes the application of it to the contemporary world from a faith perspective possible. Many have attempted to make such a reading¹. Here I would make a reading of my own with the intention of preparing the biblical ground for a deliberation on Christian politics in India.

1.1. Mobility & Stability:

A Political Reading of the Old Testament

The book of Genesis begins with the creation of the world and man and moves on to the creation of a specific group of people called Israel. Abraham is asked by God to go to a land that He will show to him. Mobility and stability are the elements in this promise. There seems to be a politics of nomadic life here in play. As Abraham will move with God, he will be made stable in a land. Even this stability is relative. The tribal people formed through Jacob become a migrating people. The statement “a wandering Aramean was my ancestor...”, referring to Jacob, became the beginning of their creed (Deut 26: 5f). Israel became migrants in Egypt. However, they were active participants in the politics of storage and stability contributing heavily to the attempts to preserve the crops for long and to overcome precarious situations (cf. Gen 41: 48,49; Ex 1:11).



The book of Exodus clearly presents a politics against despotism. The Book narrates how an oppressed people were empowered under the leadership of Moses to change their king. It was not just a liberation from oppressive reign; rather, a move from the reign of Pharaoh to the reign of YHWH². It was a shift from bonded labour to free worship. It is interesting to note that the same Hebrew noun *avodah* is used both for the servile labour under Pharaoh (Ex 1,14) and the festive liturgy under YHWH (Ex 12: 22-26). “We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand” is Israel’s Passover narration (Deut 6: 21f). YHWH is their Master of freedom. The Book ends with the statement about the dedication of the Tent of Meeting and about YHWH’s presence in it!

YHWH can be perceived as a political guide of a fragile people in the Pentateuch. The statement “As an eagle stirs up its nest, and hovers over its young; as it spreads its wings, takes them up, and bears them aloft on its pinions, the Lord alone guided him” (Deut 32: 11.12) is a summary of the great event of Exodus! The inertia of the people and God’s leading and empowering role are well expressed in it. This leadership of God takes various forms in the Books of the Bible. In the Pentateuch the people of Israel become a people with a constitution, namely Torah (Ex 19; Num 10; Deut 14); In the book of Joshua, they possess a land; In Judges they have a charismatic leadership. In the books of Samuel and Kings the people obtain kings. The Deuteronomistic history evaluates the political mobility and stability on the basis of obedience to the divine Constitution i.e., Torah and holds a very negative view of the political leadership. Chronicler’s history has a different perspective. It focuses on the Davidic covenant as still valid for Israel in the late Persian time and makes very positive evaluation of the political leadership of Israel and highlights a spiritual restoration centered on the Temple and the Levites.



Thus, the political dimension of a stable Israel becomes manifested. But in this royal rule God appoints prophets who become God's critical voice to rouse kings, priests and people from the drowsiness of stability and the resulting degeneration. They were, in fact, critics of the contemporary, Israelite 'Pharaohs'. They stood vehemently for social justice as well as religious and ethical uprightness. The broad international politics was the live-context of their interventions. The Assyrian, Babylonian, Egyptian and Persian empires and the Israelite attitudes towards them were often the topics of their prophecies. The so-called royal/messianic psalms and Songs of Zion pointed to the future Messiah and the future Kingdom. The Greek socio-political-cultural invasion is the core issue in the books of Maccabees.

1.2. Lamb & Lion: A Political Reading of Jesus

Born in Palestine, a Roman province, Jesus of Nazareth lived in a complex political situation. Palestine was only a small country, yet it was on the edge of the Roman Empire at the cross-roads of three continents – Europe, Africa and Asia. The Romans had control of all the roads in and out of those areas. Roman Governor's job was to keep law and order in Palestine and make sure the Jewish people paid their taxes. Roman law and customs had been imposed on the Jewish people. The Jews did not like the Romans and there was always a great deal of tension between them. They wanted to be free from the Romans. They were awaiting the promised Messiah - a Jewish political leader - who would liberate them from the Roman dominion.

Jesus of Nazareth whom the Gospels depict was, by no means, a political figure. However, He had his own political views. Politically, He was a lamb and a lion simultaneously. He recognized and respected the existing political systems and yielded to their just rights. Even the authority of Pilate, according to Jesus, is from above (cf. Jn 19: 11). He was not



against paying taxes to Caesar (cf. Lk 20: 20-26) whom most of the Jews considered invader. At the same time Jesus dared to criticize the political authorities. He called King Herod 'fox' (cf. Lk 13: 32) because he was an insignificant or base person³.

Though not a political leader, Jesus was very much considerate of the needs of the people, interested in the sustenance, health and welfare of the people. His ordinary and extra-ordinary activities like multiplication of loaves, healing of the sick, preference for the disadvantaged, caring for the socially marginalized, etc., were all out of pure love for the people. His love and the activities stemming from His love made the people misunderstand Him to be a political figure! They tried to make Him king (cf. Jn 6: 15)!

Jesus' ministry as an itinerant preacher gave Him opportunity to meet people and understand their problems of life. The area of Galilee was about 40 miles wide and 70 miles long. We read in the gospel that He went about in "all Galilee" (Mt 4: 23) and into "all the cities and villages" (Mt 9: 35). Josephus Flavius helps us to understand the demography of the time. According to him there were 200 cities and villages and there were minimum 15,000 people in the smallest of them. So, Jesus might have met minimum 30 lakhs of people in Galilee alone. He moved about Galilee on foot. It was a special kind of *padayaatra* (constant hiking). He met people, conversed with them, grasped their issues, healed and taught them.

In today's language, Jesus' knowledge was more than that from a sample survey and it was almost like a 'data collection'. He could obtain first-hand information about the ground level realities of the inhabitants of Galilee. So, "when he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Mt 9: 36). In the contemporary language, we may



say that this statement reflects the result of a 'data analysis'. It is compassion stemming from the realization of the pitiable condition of the people. The Greek expressions for 'harassed' and 'helpless' demand our special attention. The word *ἔσκυλλμένοι* (*eskulmenoi* from the root *skullo*), translated as harassed, literally means 'being flayed' or 'having the skin torn'. The sheep without shepherd may pass through rocky areas and thorny bushes and have their skin torn and wounded. The term *ἐρριμμένοι* (*errimmenoi* from the root *ripto*), translated as helpless, means 'thrown down prone and helpless'. The sheep that fall on their back with legs upwards cannot stand up on their own. There should be a shepherd to help them.

Jesus' lifestyle and company always reflected his special care for the least. Yes, He really observed the principle of 'reservation for the disadvantaged or backward classes'. His assurance of gospel to the poor (Lk 4: 18), touch to the lepers (Lk 5: 13), forgiveness to the sinner (Lk 16: 19-31), celebration for the prodigal son (Lk 18: 9-14), etc., clearly show his option for the fragile, the fallen and the marginalised, even taking the risk of going against the religious and cultural practices.

2. Church and Politics

Social commitment within the Early Church can be considered as the elementary form of her political sensibility. From her humble beginning onwards, Church has always stood by the side of the poor, the suffering and the oppressed and has created systems to alleviate their pain and misery (Acts 4: 32-35). There developed an ecclesial system for the support of the widows (Acts 6: 1). At the emergence of conflict over the uprightness in distribution, a system of diaconate was erected for its proper administration (Acts 6: 5). For supporting the poverty-stricken Jerusalem, all Churches extended helping hands (cf. Acts 11: 29.30; 24: 17; Rom 15: 25-31).



The commitment of Christians in the world has found a variety of expressions in the course of the past 2000 years. One such expression has been Christian involvement in political life. An early Church writer in *Letter to Diognetus* 5: 5 states that Christians “play their full role as citizens”⁴. There are many men and women saints, like St. Thomas More who served God through their generous commitment to politics and government. The Second Vatican Council document “Church in the Modern World” presents Christian political leaders as those who “demonstrate concretely how authority can be compatible with freedom, personal initiative with the solidarity of the whole social organism, and the advantages of unity with fruitful diversity” (GS no. 75). It envisages political parties as promoting “those things which in their judgement are required for the common good; it is never allowable to give their interests priority over the common good” (GS no. 75).

Though responsible and generous political involvement is demanded of all the citizens for a productive democracy, this involvement has diverse and complementary “forms, levels, tasks, and responsibilities”⁵, as far as various members of the Church are concerned. Bishops, priests and the religious are not expected to involve actively in political parties and to take up governmental offices⁶. In 2002 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*.

2.1. Church: Not a Political Entity, but a Promoting Entity

However, the involvement of Christians in politics should not be mistaken to view the Church as a political entity. The Church and political community are autonomous and independent from each other in their own fields. Whereas State has temporal goals, Church has transcendental goals. But of course, co-operation between Church and State is



possible since both “are devoted to the personal and social vocation of the same men. The more that both foster sounder cooperation between themselves ..., the more effective will their service be exercised for the good of all” (GS no. 76).

As the title of the fifth chapter of *Fratelli Tutti* sounds, Church should always be a catalyst for ‘A Better Kind of Politics’. After referring to the distasteful side of the present politics due to the mistakes, corruption and inefficiency of some politicians and many other unhealthy trends, Pope Francis asks: “Yet can our world function without politics? Can there be an effective process of growth towards universal fraternity and social peace without a sound political life?” (FT no. 176). Thus, a positive and creative attitude towards politics has been and is the permanent mark of the Church.

2.2. Love as the Basis of Politics

Already in 1927, the Church hinted at the love dimension of politics. Pope Pius XI’s address to the Italian Catholic Federation of University Students presented political charity as the most vast field of charity⁷. In his encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, he invited humanity to work for a social and political order whose soul is social charity⁸. Saint Paul VI, in the Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio* no. 44, commented that charity, with its impulse to universality, is capable of building a new world⁹. Saint John Paul II used the expression ‘social love’ in his Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* no.15. Pope Benedict XVI, in the Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* no. 2, presented charity as “the principle not only of micro-relationships (with friends, with family members or within small groups) but also of macro-relationships (social, economic and political ones)”¹⁰. Pope Francis has developed this theme in detail in his various magisterial interventions. In *Evangelii Gaudium* no. 205, he presents politics as “one of the highest forms of charity”. In *Laudato Si’* no. 231, Pope states that charity “makes itself felt in every



action that seeks to build a better world”¹¹. In Encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, he gives two direct evidences of the exercise of political love: “If someone helps an elderly person cross a river, that is a fine act of charity. The politician, on the other hand, builds a bridge, and that too is an act of charity. While one person can help another by providing something to eat, the politician creates a job for that other person, and thus practices a lofty form of charity that ennobles his or her political activity” (no. 186).

Now let us move on to the consideration of the practical features of the ecclesial vision of politics.

3. A Roadmap to a Christian Politics¹² in India

The Second Vatican Council exhorts Christian politicians that “they should dedicate themselves to the service of all with sincerity and fairness, indeed, with the charity and fortitude demanded by political life” (GS no. 75). Thus, service-mindedness accompanied by sincerity, fairness, charity and fortitude is presented as the gist of Christian political activity and the life principle of Christian politicians. Now let us take up the practical elements of Christian politics.

3.1. Holding Democracy High

As we know, democracy is generally considered to be the best available system of government. Interestingly, all the so-called Christian countries are substantially democratic¹³. Why? There could be various reasons. One of them seems to be the fact that democracy is perfectly concomitant with the value system of Christians which is essentially related to their faith convictions, especially the Trinitarian faith¹⁴. Trinity which is basically oneness of three persons is the source and model of all harmonious living together. It is really worth noting that the Trinitarian revelation in and through the person of Jesus Christ was later translated with a single word by the beloved disciple – ‘Love’ (1 Jn 4: 8.16)! It is in this



perspective that the ultimate God-revelation in the person of Jesus Christ becomes conducive to the democratic system of politics¹⁵. Wherever Trinitarian faith has deep roots, we see the flourishing of democracy. In such democracy there is clear focus on human dignity, gender equality, religious freedom and social security¹⁶.

In the vision of the Church, democracy “succeeds only to the extent that it is based on correct understanding of human person”¹⁷ and the protection of “the rights of the person is, indeed, a necessary condition for citizens, individually and collectively, to play an active part in public life and administration” (GS no. 75). Pope Benedict XVI considered democracy as the guardian of human dignity and was of the opinion that in the absence of the awareness of the ethical rule, democracy will degenerate into dictatorship of relativism. The Trinitarian faith which is pivotal to Christianity calls for liberty, equality and fraternity which are called ‘the trinity/triad of democracy’¹⁸.

So, the role of *Constitution* is very important as far as the concept of human dignity and freedom are concerned. Constitutional democracy is the most practical solution to the freedom of each being compatible with the freedom of all. Hence Christian politics in India should firmly stand for the protection of *Indian Constitution*.

The present status of Indian democracy, as found in various international reports, does not really cheer us up. India ranks 108th in the Electoral Democracy Index of the V-dem Democracy report 2023. India has also been named in the top 10 autocratising countries in the last 10 years in the report released in March 2003. India’s ranking dipped from the 100th position in 2022 to 108th this year in the reports of Electoral Democracy Index (EDI) while it was 97th in the Liberal Democracy Index (LDI). The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) of London placed India in the category of “flawed



democracy” and its rank deteriorated sharply from 27 in 2014 to 53 in 2020 though it improved a bit to 46 in 2021. US Freedom House in its *Freedom in the World 2023* report ranked India to be ‘partly free’ with a score of 66/100 just as in 2022. It was in 2021 that the report downgraded India from ‘free’ to ‘partly free’. India’s ranking in the 2023 World Press Freedom Index has slipped to 161 out of 180 countries, according to the latest report released by global media watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF) in May 2023. The ranking is based on five categories - political, legislative, economic, socio-cultural and safety of journalists. Press freedom in India has gone from “problematic” to “very bad”, with the country slipping 11 ranks since the 2022.

3.2. Secular Politics

Secularism¹⁹ is most commonly defined as the separation of religion from civil affairs and the state. This definition sounds improper in countries like India where much of the educational, health-care and social service activities are headed by religious groups aptly supported by the state. In India the term secularism²⁰, a late comer into the Constitution, means that the state favours no particular religion. All religions have equal dignity and status before law. According to article 25 of *Indian Constitution*, any religion can be believed, practiced and propagated in India. But unfortunately, religion seems to be playing a great role in Indian politics now. Saffronisation is visible in all spheres of public life. It is sad to see how even the electoral propaganda begins to wear religious colours and slogans!

We Christians are obliged, by our very faith, to uphold true secularism envisaged by the Constitution. Christ himself has taught us to be secular, not to conflate religion and state. I don’t think any religious founder has contributed as much to secular politics as Christ has. That is why all the democratic countries that clearly have Christian roots are fully secular.



Though they are often called ‘Christian countries’, their constitution is never the Holy Bible; nor do they prefer religious affiliations to the denial of anybody’s right to religion. The secular vision of Jesus Christ is evident in the biblical passages that refer to the payment of taxes to Caesar which all three parallel Gospels describe (Mt 22: 15-21; Mk 12: 13-17; Lk 20: 20-26). His classic statement (“give to the Caesar the things that are the Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s”), in my view, is the golden verse of secularism. The mind of Jesus, her founder, has been well captured by the Church. It is manifested through her clear stand on the distinction between Church and State: “The Church, by reason of her role and competence, is not identified in any way with the political community nor bound to any political system. She is at once a sign and a safeguard of the transcendent character of the human person” (GS no. 76). Following the vision of Christ and Church, Christians in India have to oppose all majoritarian communalist attempts to establish a *Hindu rashtra* as well as any minoritarian communalist moves that favour an *Islamic state* or a *Christian state*, if at all!²¹

3.3. Pro-Poor Politics

The imagery of ‘The Good Samaritan’, in my view, is very much apt for a good government. The wounded and the helpless in the country are the main focus of such a politics. According to Pope Francis, one of the foremost and imperative goals of politics is effective elimination of hunger (FT no. 189). In an address to participants in the World Meeting of Popular Movements conducted in 2014, the Roman Pontiff made a revolutionary statement: “Hunger is criminal; food is an inalienable right”²². He calls upon the international politics not to tolerate any longer the sources of ‘shame for humanity’ i.e., denial of the basic needs of man like food, water, shelter and health care and the scandal of human trafficking (FT no. 189).



In India voter turnout is generally higher in rural areas than in cities. It means that the poor have higher expectations of the state than the rich. However, despite their numerical supremacy, poor people are often unable to have a strong or lasting effect on public policy²³. In this agony of the poor there should come up Poverty-based movements that can influence government action.

Fortunately, in the last few decades, pro-poor democratic politics have been strengthened in India through the recognition of various rights, such as the right to education²⁴, to information, to food security²⁵, to employment²⁶, and to land²⁷. National Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) presents a progress review in 2023. According to the Report, 135 million people escaped multidimensional poverty between 2015-16 and 2019-21. The rural areas witnessed the fastest decline in poverty, from 32.59% to 19.28%. India's economic freedom score is 52.9, making its economy the 131st freest in the 2023 Index.

3.4. Pastoral Politics

Christian politics in India should always be in favour of the just cause of the Christian community here. First of all, it should stand for the just rights of the Church in the country. Right to propagate our faith has been guaranteed by the very Constitution of India. Unfortunately, various Indian Governments at various times have encroached upon these rights raising unfounded accusation of 'forced conversions' and introducing anti-conversion laws. Nine state legislatures have already passed it, even without proving a single case of forced conversion! Christian politics should be objecting to these legislations and challenging them in the court.

The backwardness of the Christian community in India has to be effectively brought to the notice of the governments. A systematic study in the model of Sachar committee can be demanded. The plain injustice done to Dalit Christians



should be questioned and their just cause should be vehemently fought for. We should be cautious and vigilant about the communal usurpation of the rights of Christian minority by other communities, orchestrated communal violence ignited by interested parties, etc. Christian leaders should be careful not to yield to the pressure tactics of the politicians at the expense of the interests of the Church. Unfortunately, the CBCI could not effectively intervene in the release of Fr. Stan Samy SJ the 84-year-old priest. Nor could it even organize a fitting nation-wide protest at the custody-death of the veteran priest. Similar indecisive stand was evident also in the case of Manipur riot. Very often ecclesial leaders seem to be interested only in the politics that benefit our institutions, not the live issues of our people and nation.

3.5. Prophetic Politics

To fight evil at its root is important for those who believe in Christ. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu states, “as Christians, we need to not just be pulling the drowning bodies out of the river. We need to be going upstream to find out who is pushing them in”²⁸. In his address to the United Nations Organization in 2015, Pope Francis made a strong intervention on various scourges that the humanity is facing now like human trafficking, the marketing of human organs and tissues, the sexual exploitation of boys and girls, slave labour, including prostitution, the drug and weapons trade, terrorism and international organized crime²⁹.

Christians should be ready to fight against all fascistic and despotic tendencies of the public authority. The Second Vatican Council calls upon all Christian politicians to “take action against any form of injustice and tyranny, against arbitrary domination by an individual or a political party and any intolerance” (GS no. 75). A true Christian politics will be capable of non-cooperating with the authorities in



their evil projects and denouncing it. We have St. Thomas More, who was proclaimed Patron of Statesmen and Politicians, as our model in this respect. In the same way, all terroristic and fundamentalistic elements that are trying to creep in and disturb the life of the nation should be withstood. Any politics that promote such destructive forces should be exposed and opposed by Christians.

3.6. Practical Politics

Martin Luther King's sarcastic statement that we enjoy playing the Good Samaritan on life's roadside, but we rarely take the time to do the harder work is thought provoking. He asks, "Who is going back to the Jericho road to work out how to stop more people getting mugged?"³⁰ Politics should be basically practical, not just theoretical. We must realize that "Christian faith has never presumed to impose a rigid framework on social and political questions, conscious that the historical dimension requires men and women to live in imperfect situations"³¹. In the 5th Century itself St. Augustine had written about the imperfect status of the 'city of man' in his *De civitate Dei*³².

3.7. Pro-Life Politics

Christian politics should definitely be life-protective as well as life-promotional. In harmony with the Church's constant teaching, Pope John Paul II teaches "that those who are directly involved in lawmaking bodies have a 'grave and clear obligation to oppose' any law that attacks human life. For them, as for every Catholic, it is impossible to promote such laws or to vote for them"³³. The "Doctrinal note" discusses elaborately the issues of abortion, euthanasia, the rights of the human embryo, the family, the protection of minors, the contemporary forms of slavery, religious freedom, the economy and peace. Catholic politicians have to approach all these issues from the perspective of moral law³⁴.



A study published in *The Lancet Global Health medical journal* in 2017, a total of 15.6 million (1.56 crore) abortions took place across India in 2015, against the 7 lakh figure the Centre has been putting out every year for the last 15 years, reports *The Times of India*.³⁵

3.8. Politics of Common Good

Writers differ vastly on the definition of common good; but all are in agreement with the idea that the goal of government should be good of all the citizens and that government should not be the slave of special interests. The idea of common good is very ancient in the Church. Epistle of Barnabas, written between AD 70 and 132, invites Christians to seek the common good³⁶. St. Augustine, in *De civitate Dei*, discusses and answers affirmatively to the question: 'Is human wellbeing found in the good of the whole society, the common good?'³⁷ St. Thomas Aquinas developed the theme elaborately³. With him the concept became well spread in Catholic moral teachings. Later, with *Rerum novarum* of Pope Leo XIII it became a central concept in Catholic social teachings. Vatican Council defines common good as "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily" (GS no. 26). The Council insisted on the primacy of the good of the person over the social order and its development. St. Pope John Paul II in the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (1993) strongly opposed the political corruption (no. 98) and relaxation of moral norms which very badly affect the common good. He advised the political leaders to imbibe the virtues of truthfulness, honesty, fairness, temperance and solidarity (VS nos. 98-100). The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004), chapter 4, part II summarises the contemporary Catholic social teaching on common good and develops it further. Besides the social conditions, it is the end goal of human life



(which is 'with' others and 'for' others) in society and is historically attainable (nos.165 and 168).

Conclusion

Indian Christian politics has already a face - that of Fr. Stan Samy the Jesuit priest who stood boldly for the rights to land of the tribals against the governmental policies to hand the land over to the corporates in the mining sector and who paid the price for his prophetic stand with his custody death. He has become the icon of justice for the downtrodden and of uncompromising protest against the unjust governmental policies. As we have reached the end of this investigation, we are in a position to speak with sufficient clarity about the Christian politics. The Holy Scripture offers us a model for engaging in politics. Earthly rulers possess delegated power only. Absolutistic claims to power and the resulting oppressive style of government cannot stand the test of the Bible. Pharaohs of any time will be rebuked by the prophets of the Lord. Arrogant autocrats will be made to step down by the people empowered by the mighty hand of the Lord. Jesus the Love made flesh has shown us love as the true path to harmony and resulting development. His due docility towards and courageous criticism before political authorities is a perfect model for any citizen. His first-hand knowledge of the ground realities of the people, the means through which He gained it and His preferential love for the disadvantaged and the marginalized are a motivation for all politicians. Though the Church who follows her master has the Transcendent as the goal, she plays effective role in promoting political love by her teachings and timely interventions.

We, Christians have the duty of promoting a politics of love in India. It should necessarily enhance the democratic, secularist, pro-poor, pastoral, prophetic, practical and pro-life fabric of the Indian politics for the common good. And



we have a recent hero and martyr as a model for such a politics - Fr. Stan Samy SJ! May that great soul inspire the whole Indian Christians to come out of lethargy, fear, selfishness and opportunism and contribute positively with service-mindedness accompanied by sincerity, fairness, charity and fortitude.

Endnotes

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- ¹ David JANZEN, *Chronicles and the Politics of Davidic Restoration: A Quiet Revolution*, Library of Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament Studies 655 (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017); Richard BAUCKHAM, *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically* (London: SPCK; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011); Rob BARRETT, *Disloyalty and Destruction: Religion and Politics in Deuteronomy and the Modern World* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2009); Yairah AMIT, "Literature in the Service of Politics: Studies in Judges 19-21," in *Politics and Theopolitics in the Bible and Postbiblical Literature*, eds. Henning Graf Reventlow, Yair Hoffman and Benjamin Uffenheimer, JSOTSS 171 (Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), pp. 28-40; and James BARR, "The Bible as a Political Document," in *The Scope and Authority of the Bible: Explorations in Theology* 7 (1980): pp. 91-110.
- ² For an elaborate study of it, see Walter BRUEGGEMANN, "Scripture: Old Testament," in *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. William T. Cavanaugh (Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), pp. 7-20.
- ³ Cf. H.W. HOEHNER, *Herod Antipas: A Contemporary of Jesus Christ* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press [SNTSMS], 1972), p. 347.
- ⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2240.
- ⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles laici*, no. 42.
- ⁶ Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *Directory for the Ministry and Life of Priests* (March 31, 1994), no. 33. This is clearly stated also in *CIC* can. 285 § 3; and cf. *CCEO* can. 384#2. At the same time *CIC* can. 287 §2 hints at the possibility of exception in this legislation: "They are not to have an active



part in political parties and in governing labor unions unless, in the judgment of competent ecclesiastical authority, the protection of the rights of the Church or the promotion of the common good requires it”.

- ⁷ Cf. *L'Osservatore Romano* (23 December 1927), p. 3.
- ⁸ AAS 23 (1931), pp. 206-207.
- ⁹ AAS 59 (1967), p. 279.
- ¹⁰ AAS 101 (2009), p. 642.
- ¹¹ AAS 107 (2015), p. 937. For an appraisal of Pope Francis' visions of democracy from the economic point of view reflected in *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Laudato si*, see S. Stewart BRAUN, “Pope Francis and Economic Democracy: Understanding Pope Francis's Radical (yet) Practical Approach to Political Economy”, *Theological Studies* 81, no. 1 (2020): pp. 203-224.
- ¹² Here I would like to clarify that whenever I refer to politics in this paper, it points only to politics in general and not to any party politics.
- ¹³ Almost all the theologians now think that the form of government most compatible with Christianity is democracy and that the historic opposition of the Christian tradition to democracy and to various forms of liberalism was a mistake.
- ¹⁴ Cf. Karl BARTH, *Church Dogmatics*, 4 vols., trans. and ed. by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936-77); *Community, State, and Church: Three Essays* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2005); Robin LOVIN, *Christian Faith and Public Choices: The Social Ethics of Barth, Brunner, and Bonhoeffer* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); David HADDORFF, “Trinitarian political theology and radical democracy: Barth, Mouffe and the Populist Moment”, *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* On-line version 5, no.1 (Stellenbosch 2019); Luke BRETHERTON, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics. The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2010); *Resurrecting Democracy. Faith, Citizenship, and the Politics of a Common Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); and *Christ and the Common Life: Political Theology and the Case for Democracy* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2019). For different voice, see Robert P. KRAYNAK, *Christian Faith and Modern Democracy: God and Politics in the Fallen World, Loyola Lectures in Political Analysis* (2001).
- ¹⁵ Luke Bretherton offers a theological basis for, and a radical revisioning of, the relationship between Christianity and democracy. He argues that democracy itself is inherently relational - a form of love in action, built on a “set of relational practices [that] fosters forms of disciplined and active listening, and a way we can discover with and for others just and generous forms of common life”, cf. Luke BRETHERTON, *Christ and the Common Life: Political Theology and the Case for Democracy* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2019). There are claims about Christian contributions to the evolution of the modern democracy. Walter Ulman observes that a governmental system similar to the modern democracy had been visualized by the medieval Christians thinkers. St. Thomas Aquinas was of the opinion that legislation should be done by the whole community or its representatives. He considered the best government to be the one in the



election of which all had role. It is he who for the first time used the expression 'universal suffrage' or 'franchise' (cf. Paul E. SIGMUND, "The Catholic Tradition and Modern Democracy", *The Review of Politics*, Cambridge University Press, 49, no. 4: pp. 530-548). Pope Leo XIII in the Encyclical *Graves de communi re* (1901) held that democracy is the most catholic system of governance. However, he specifies that the Catholic democracy should benefit the most miserable in the society, work for the common good, be favourable to the interest of all and discourage personal interests. Jac Maritan describes democracy as the fruit of the Gospel and its unfolding in history (Cf. Bogdan SZLACHTA, "The Catholic Church in Liberal Democracy: Rights of a Human Person and Human Rights", *Pro Publico Bono – Public Administration*, Jagiellonian University 2, no. 1 (2021): pp. 104-129).

¹⁶ In an attempt to promote a common understanding of the principles and values of democracy, the UN Human Rights Commission, in 2002, declared the following as the essential elements of democracy: respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of opinion and expression, and freedom of association; access to power and its exercise in accordance with the rule of law; the holding of periodic free and fair elections by universal suffrage and by secret ballot as the expression of the will of the people; a pluralistic system of political parties and organizations; the separation of powers; the independence of the judiciary; transparency and accountability in public administration; free, independent and pluralistic media (available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/about-democracy-and-human-rights>).

¹⁷ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, no. 3.

¹⁸ Justice, liberty, equality and fraternity are the constitutional values of India.

¹⁹ This is a theme of great discussion in today's world. The Grease project funded by European Union deserves special mention: Tariq MODOOD and Thomas SEALY, *Secularism and the Governance of Religious Diversity* (University of Bristol, 2019). So many books and articles have been published in this regard. A few of them are: Berlinerblau JACQUES, *Secularism: The Basics* (Routledge, 2021); Andrew COPSON, *Secularism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2019); Berlinerblau JACQUES, *How to Be Secular: A Call to Arms for Religious Freedom* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012); Paul CLITEUR, *The Secular Outlook: In Defense of Moral and Political Secularism* (2010); Greg URBAN, "The Circulation of Secularism. International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society", *Wayback Machine* 21, nos. 1–4 (2008): pp. 17–37; Charles TAYLOR, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007); Barry A. KOSMIN and Keysar ARIELA, *Secularism and Secularity: Contemporary International Perspectives* (Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture, 2007); David MARTIN, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Susan JACOBY, *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004); Iain BENSON, "Considering Secularism in Farrows", in *Recognizing Religion in a Secular Society*, ed. Douglas (McGill-



- Queens Press, 2004); and Talal ASAD, *Formations of The Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford University Press, 2003).
- ²⁰ For a treatment of secularism as constitutional mandate upon the state to combat the factors which curtails religious fraternity, see Samika PACHOULY, “Contemporary Relevance of the Term Secular in the Preamble”, *Internet Journal of Political Science and Public Affairs* 10, no. 2 (2022), available at: <https://www.longdom.org/open-access/contemporary-relevance-of-the-term-secular-in-the-preamble-84041.html#6> .
- ²¹ For further study, see Anuradha Dingwaney NEEDHAM and Rajeswari SUNDER RAJA, eds., *The Crisis of Secularism in India* (Duke University Press, 2007).
- ²² AAS 106 (2014), p. 853.
- ²³ A. VARSHNEY, *Democracy, Development and the Countryside: Urban-Rural Struggles in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); M. MOORE and J. PUTZEL, “Thinking Strategically About Politics and Poverty”, IDS Working Paper 101 (Brighton: Institute of Development Studies).
- ²⁴ Cf. *The Right to Education Act* (2009).
- ²⁵ Cf. *The National Food Security Act* (2013).
- ²⁶ Cf. *The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act* (MGNREGA) of 2005.
- ²⁷ Cf. *The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act* (2013).
- ²⁸ Andy FLANNAGAN, “Five Reasons Why Christians Shouldn’t Be Involved in Party Politics”, *Political Theology* 12, no. 1 (2011): p. 9.
- ²⁹ Cf. AAS 107 (2015), p. 1039.
- ³⁰ FLANNAGAN, “Five Reasons Why Christians Shouldn’t Be Involved in Party Politics”, p. 9.
- ³¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, no. 8.
- ³² Cf. Paul WEITHMAN, “Augustine’s Political Philosophy”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 234-252.
- ³³ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium vitae*, no. 73.
- ³⁴ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, no. 4.
- ³⁵ Available at: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/1-6-crore-abortions-a-year-in-india-81-at-home-study/articleshow/62030066.cms>
- ³⁶ “Do not live entirely isolated, having retreated into yourselves, as if you were already [fully] justified, but gather instead to seek together the common good”, *Ep. Barnabae*, 4,10: PG 2,734.
- ³⁷ Cf. chapters 5-17 of Book XIX.
- ³⁸ Cf. Michael SHERWIN, “St. Thomas and the Common Good: The Theological Perspective: An Invitation to Dialogue”, *Angelicum* 70, no. 3 (1993): pp. 307-328.

