

POLITICAL DIMENSION OF THE CHURCH'S LIBERATIVE MISSION OF THE POOR AND CREATION

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***Abstract:** Pastoral agents of the Catholic Church as well as of other Churches beginning with the pope, bishops, priests, pastors till nuns whose ministry inevitably makes them get involved in the socio-economic and political affairs of a given nation state or the world in general are often accused of meddling in affairs of governments and demand them to get out of their way. This article argues that this is a false accusation. The Church's ministry to stand in solidarity with the poor oppressed and safeguard creation, for instance, requires the Church –which means here all Christians – to get involved in the world's socio-political affairs. Thus, the Church is and must be political in a broad and noble sense. The prophetic liberative mission of the Church includes promoting love, justice, solidarity and fraternity among the entire human family, defending the dignity of the human person in its fullness and safeguarding the integrity of creation in cooperation with all people of good will. The Church will be in position of supporting the world's socio-economic and political affairs, but will stand up to condemn unjust practices in any form that do not respect the dignity of the human person, destroy the livelihoods of the poor or do not safeguard creation as the common heritage of all mankind. And this is done by the Church without taking over the unjust socio-economic and political structures being condemned and without violating the principle of separation of religion and state.*

INTRODUCTION

Historically, the prophetic liberative mission of the Catholic Church to stand in solidarity with the poor oppressed, weak and marginalized and condemn the causes of their poverty and oppression which are often embedded in unjust socio-economic structures is as old as the Church itself. It has its foundation in God's own liberative mission in the Old Testament and in the liberative ministry of the Lord Jesus in the New Testament. Yet this missionary commitment, systematically formulated as social doctrine, was begun only in 1891 with the publication of Leo XIII's *Rerum novarum* (On Capital and Labor). The encyclical, considered as the first ever on social issues, was written as the Church's prophetic response to social and economic problems caused by the tempestuous industrial revolution of the time. During the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the Catholic Church became increasingly aware of its commitment, concern and solidarity with all humanity especially the poor and those suffering from various forms of social injustice.

In *Gaudium et Spes*, the council fathers of the Second Vatican Council view the Church as a constitutive part of the world community which cannot simply stand by idly in the face of critical world affairs. With this in mind, the Church says: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ."² Still during the Second Vatican Council, while being aware the Church of Christ is not

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² Ecumenical Council of Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (Rome, 7th of December 1965), No. 1.

supposed to run the political, social and economic order, the Church believes that there is a need to inspire the world order with the divine law:

Christ, to be sure, gave His Church no proper mission in the political, economic or social order. The purpose which He set before her is a religious one. But out of this religious mission itself comes a function, a light and an energy which can serve to structure and consolidate the human community according to the divine law. As a matter of fact, when circumstances of time and place produce the need, she [the Church] can and indeed should initiate activities on behalf of all men, especially those designed for the needy, such as the works of mercy and similar undertakings.³

Out of this new awareness of pastoral urgency for dealing with the immensity of social injustice in the world, the Church, during the Second Vatican Council, strongly recommended the establishment of a pontifical body working for justice and peace:

The council, considering the immensity of the hardships which still afflict the greater part of mankind today, regards it as most opportune that an organism of the universal Church be set up in order that both the justice and love of Christ toward the poor might be developed everywhere. The role of such an organism would be to stimulate the Catholic community to promote progress in needy regions and international social justice.⁴

As the follow up of this call, in 1967 – two years after the Second Vatican Council – Paul VI, established the Pontifical Commission of Justice and Peace. In a speech given to the members and consultants of this group on 20th of April 1967, Paul VI stated that he views the commission as a rooster that perches on top of the Church body calling for vigilance for the entire program of the liberative mission of the Church, especially in regard to justice and peace in every aspect of human life:

You [Justice and Peace Commission] represent us the realization of the last vote of the Council (GS 9). Today, as in the past, once the construction of a Church or bell tower is finished, a rooster is placed on top as symbol of vigilance, for the faith and for the entire program of Christian life. In similar fashion, this Committee has been placed on top of the spiritual building of the Council, and its mission is none other than that of keeping the eyes of the Church open, its heart sensitive and its hand prepared for the work of charity which it is called upon to realize in the world, so as to promote the progress of poorer peoples, and promote social justice among nations.⁵

After a ten-year experimental period, Paul VI gave the Commission its definitive status with the *Motu Proprio, Iustitiam et Pacem* on the 10th of December 1976. On the 28th of June 1988, John Paul II changed the title of this ecclesial body from Commission of Justice and Peace to Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. As for the objectives and mandate of the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace, the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus* of 1988 defines them as follows:

The goal of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace is to promote justice and peace in the world in accordance with the Gospel and the social teaching of the Church. 1) The Council makes a thorough study of the social teaching of the Church and ensures that this teaching is widely spread and put into practice among people and communities, especially regarding the relations between workers and management, relations that must come to be more and more imbued with the spirit of the Gospel. 2) It collects information and research on justice and peace, about human development and violations of human rights; it ponders all this, and, when appropriate, shares its conclusions with the groupings of bishops. It cultivates relationships with Catholic international organizations and other institutions, even ones outside the Catholic

³ Ibid., No. 42.

⁴ Ibid., No. 90.

⁵ *Discours du Pape Paul VI Aux Membres et Consultants de "Iustitiae et Pax"*, 20th of April 1967. Original text is in French and English translation is mine.

Church, which sincerely strive to achieve peace and justice in the world. 3) It works to form among peoples a mentality which fosters peace, especially on the occasion of World Peace Day.⁶

Following the foundation of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in 1967, Justice and Peace Commissions were slowly set up at national, regional and diocesan levels and in every religious congregation within the Catholic Church throughout the world. During the Second CELAM in Medellín 1968, the Latin American Bishops were quickly aware of the need to establish Justice and Peace Commissions across Latin America: “The Justice and Peace Commission should be promoted in all countries [throughout Latin America], at least nationally”⁷ which led to the birth of liberation theology in continent. While at the Pontifical level the commission is still called Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, within Religious Orders and Congregations as well as at diocesan levels Justice and Peace commissions, in 1990s and following the footsteps of the World Council of Churches, were renamed the Commission for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC). The name itself indicates the link between justice and environment, between option for the poor and option for the earth. Within religious congregations, the mission mandate of JPIC is patterned on that of the Pontifical Council.

In short, in the last fifty years since the Second Vatican Council, the liberative missionary commitment of the worldwide Catholic Church and other mainline Churches as well has revolved around and is coordinated by the Commission of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC). In order to opt to liberate the oppressed poor, safeguard integrity of creation and denounce the world’s various socio-economic injustices, inevitably the Church, in cooperation with followers of other religions and with all people of good will, must confront the world’s social, economic and political affairs by being political yet without necessarily taking over the socio-economic and political structures themselves.

1. PROBLEM: CAN THE CHURCH BE POLITICAL?

Yet a question that is often hotly raised by many is this: Can the Church be political? Why should the Church get involved in the world’s social, economic and political affairs? There is no doubt that many in the world society today, either Christians, religious or lay Catholics themselves, would be very quick to answer “no”. The reason is that the Church in their understanding cannot be political and, needless to say, cannot get involved in the social, economic and political matters of the world. They argue, there is a separation of religion and state or of Church and politics. The Church is only to manage spiritual matters, while economy and politics are secular matters that belong to the state governments. Instances of this point of view abound everywhere worldwide.

Local Catholic Church in Flores Island in Indonesia, for instance, has prophetically stood in solidarity with the rural farming communities of the island in their fight for land rights against the invasions of transnational mining corporations (TMNCs) driven by global neoliberal economic system. In an unholy alliance with corrupt Indonesian governments, TMNCs mercilessly destroyed their farms and rainforest permanently, polluting their rivers and seas and drying up source of drinking water. The local Catholic Church that has

⁶ John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus* of 1988 (Rome, 28th of June 1988), No. 142-143.

⁷ CELAM II, *Human Promotion: Justice* (Medellín, 6th of September 1968), No. 21.

advocated the rural farming communities has unfortunately been accused of meddling in the affairs of the Indonesian government and was required to get out of their way. The Indonesian local governments of the island, who are mostly Catholics, hold that social, economic and political matters belong to the state. On this basis, they called on the Church to stop interfering in public policies of the state especially in regard to the mining industry despite the fact that it is operated by permanently destroying the farms of the villagers, as well as abounding with fraud and dishonesty. They insisted that the Church, particularly its hierarchies – bishops, priests and nuns – should only manage its own business in spiritual matters, that is, helping people go to heaven by teaching them to pray and minister to them with the holy sacraments.

Such an accusation is, of course, not uniquely experienced by the Church in Flores, Indonesia. It is a common challenge faced by the Church anywhere in the world in its prophetic liberative mission to stand with the oppressed poor and safeguard the integrity of creation. To mention another example, at the birth of liberation theology in Latin America the Church was also confronted with the same difficulty as narrated by Leonardo Boff in his *Church, Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church*:

When one speaks of social injustice and liberation, one has already placed oneself in the heart of a situation of political domination. But there is no more ambiguous word than “politics”. Reactionary forces within the Church and society take advantage of this ambiguity to free themselves from the struggle for justice. We read headlines such as “The Church must not be involved in politics,” “Pope prohibits priests and bishops from involvement in politics,” “No politics in the Mass,” [or] “No politics in the churches.” What exactly is meant by “politics” [all emphases are original from the author]?⁸

2. FUNDAMENTAL REASONS FOR THE CHURCH BEING POLITICAL

Contrary to what is claimed by many, Leonardo Boff hinted in the above quotation argues that the Church is political. Faced with any given reality of social injustice, the Church must be political and cannot be apolitical. In line with Leonardo Boff, Antonio Eguiguren OFM, in an article published by SEDOS in November 2012, says: “What makes the Church a non-credible Institution is its involvement in politics and its siding with power... [But the truth is that] the whole Church needs to be political, siding with the poor in order to make a better society.”⁹ But how is this political dimension of the Church is to be understood in the frame of Christian faith? In other words, why is the Church, or why does it need to be political? The late Archbishop Oscar Romero, the martyr of the poor of El Salvador, gives one of the answers.

Drawn from his concrete experience of incarnating the Church in the world of the poor and firmly committing it to the defense of the poor oppressed and repressed by economic and political structures in El Salvador up till the 1980s, Archbishop Romero said that faith conviction and the transcendence of the Gospel are the forces that guide the Church to stand up and engage in social and political situations. He put forward three fundamental aspects of Christian faith enriched through its incarnation in the socio-political world, that is, a new

⁸ Boff Leonardo, *Church, Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1985), p. 26.

⁹ Eguiguren Antonio OFM, “Vatican II and Mission: Some Comments from the Periphery” in *SEDOS Bulletin* September-October 2012, Volume 44, No. 9/10, pp. 291-292.

awareness of sin, a continuation of God's salvific incarnation through Jesus, and a deeper faith in God.

a) A New Awareness of the Impacts of Social Sin

According to Archbishop Romero, in the Christian tradition sin is conventionally understood as offending God and such a sin means death for every human who commits it. In a traditional reflection on mortal sin, the Church had a tendency to stress attention to the permanent consequence of sin for the sinner in the form of losing eternal happiness with God in the afterlife. That is, the sinner would suffer forever because he/she would never see God. Yet the roots of sins, especially sins that are institutionalized in socio-economic and political systems and their deadly consequences in the lives of others, often did not receive adequate attention in the Church's traditional reflection. Contrary to this inadequacy, Romero said that the Church must also give proportional attention to the lethal effects of mortal sin on the material lives of other human beings and prophetically confront its causes embedded in the structures of the socio-economic and political system. In doing so, the Church has no other choice but to get involved in politics and be political. With this in mind, Archbishop Oscar Romero said that sin is mortal not only in the sense of interior death of the sinner but the negative impacts it produces *hic et nunc* in the lives of others. Witnessing such a mortal sin the Church cannot stand by idly but must engage its socio-economic and political structures as its root causes. He wrote:

Such a sin really is mortal, not only in the sense of the interior death of the person who commits the sin, but also because the real, objective death the sin produces.... A fundamental datum of our Christian faith [is that]: sin killed the Son of God, and sin is what goes on killing the children of God... It is impossible to offend God without offending one's brother or sister.... It is not a matter of sheer routine that I insist once again on the existence in our country of structures of sin. They [socio-economic and political structures] are sin because they produce the fruits of sin: the death of Salvadorans.... That is why we have denounced what in our country has become idolatry of wealth, of the absolute right, within the capitalist system of private property, of political power in the National Security regimes, in the name of which personal security is itself institutionalized. No matter how tragic it may appear, the Church through its entrance into the real socio-political world has learned how to recognize, and how to deepen its understanding of the essence of sin. The fundamental essence of sin, in our world, is revealed in the death of Salvadorans.¹⁰

b) The Continuation of God's Salvific Incarnation

The second fundamental reason of the Church for being political is its missionary nature in which it must continue the mystery of God's salvific incarnation in Jesus Christ. Like Jesus, who was God's incarnation by becoming man and living among men, engaging in and confronting all things, including human socio-economic and political structures but sin, the Church also is by its nature called to continue God's incarnation in Jesus Christ in the world by engaging and getting involved in the affairs of the world. The Church exists in the world and lives in the midst of its socio-economic and political affairs. While supporting anything good in the human socio-economic and political system, the Church at the same

¹⁰ Romero Archbishop Oscar, "The Political Dimension of the Faith from the Perspective of the Option for the Poor – delivered as a speech at the University of Louvain, February 2, 1980) in Henelly Alfred T. (ed.), *Liberation Theology: A Documentary History* (Maryknoll, New York: 1990), pp. 298-299.

time cannot stand by idly but must stand up when this system becomes exploitative and oppressive toward man himself especially toward the poor and creation. Needless to say, in the process of doing so, the Church is political. Bearing all this in mind, the late Archbishop Oscar Romero spoke of the need for the Church to incarnate itself in siding with the poor. He wrote:

We now have a better understanding of what the incarnation means, what it means to say that Jesus really took human flesh and made himself one with his brothers and sisters in suffering, in tears and laments... I am not speaking of a universal incarnation. This is impossible. I am speaking of an incarnation that is preferential and partial: incarnation in the world of the poor. From that perspective the Church will become a Church for everybody. It will offer a service to the powerful, too, through the apostolate of conversion – but not the other way around, as has so often been the case in the past. The world of the poor, with its very concrete social and political characteristics, teaches us where the Church can incarnate itself in such a way that it will avoid the false universalism that inclines the Church to associate itself with the powerful. The world of the poor teaches us what the nature of Christian love is – [It is] a love that certainly seeks peace but also unmasks false pacifism – pacifism of resignation and inactivity.¹¹

c) A Deeper and True Faith in God and Christ

The third and last fundamental reason for the Church to be political is its faith in the living God. Jesus came to bring the fullness of life to all men and women and wants them to truly live. This truth of faith, Archbishop Romero noted, becomes really true and truly radical when the Church enters into the heart of the life and death of its people. In such a situation, the Church is confronted by two choices: either to be in favor of life or in favor of the death of the exploited poor. For the Church of Christ, being neutral here is certainly impossible.¹² In other words, there is no choice for the Church but to side with the oppressed poor and by doing so it is inevitably political by engaging in and confronting the causes of poverty – unjust socio-economic and political systems. Archbishop Romero further wrote:

When the Church inserts itself into the socio-political world it does so in order to work with it so that from such cooperation life may be given to the poor. In doing so, therefore, it is not distancing itself from its mission, nor is it doing something of secondary importance or something incidental to its mission. It is giving testimony to its faith in God; it is being the instrument of the Spirit, the Lord and giver of life.... As Church, we are not [political] experts [in politics], nor do we want to manipulate politics through its own internal mechanism. But entrance into the socio-political world, into the world where the lives and deaths of the great mass of the population are decided upon, is necessary and urgent if we are to preserve, not only in word but in deed, faith in a God of life and follow the lead of Jesus.¹³

3. THE MEANING OF THE CHURCH BEING POLITICAL

In public parlance, especially in our secular world, politics is often associated with something dirty or dishonest. It deals in lies or propaganda that involves corruption, manipulation and the fight for the interests of certain groups. Yet, as noted by Leonardo Boff, this is politics that has been corrupted or become pathological. Politics in its original meaning and purpose is very noble with a highly positive concept as defined by Aristotle that human beings are by their nature political animals.¹⁴ For Aristotle, politics is the organization of the necessities of social life of the human beings. Thus for him, politics is simply the very nature

¹¹ Ibid., p. 299.

¹² Ibid., p. 300.

¹³ Ibid., p. 301.

¹⁴ Boff Leonardo, *Church: Charism*, Ibid., p. 26.

of human beings whose life has a social dimension.¹⁵ When the Church speaks of itself as being political, it speaks of politics in a positive sense as taught by Aristotle and prophetically denounces its pathologies.

a) Being Political as a Response to the Demands of the Socio-political World

In a positive sense, politics is very fundamental for the Christian faith. Indeed, it is in this sense politics is demanded by the Gospel of love, yet without engaging in politics of competition with other political institutions. As explained by Archbishop Oscar Romero, politics for the Church, or the political dimension of the Christian faith, is nothing other than the Church's response to the demands made upon the Church by the *de facto* socio-economic and political world in which the Church exists.¹⁶ Romero further explained:

This demand [of being political] is a fundamental one for the faith, and that the Church cannot ignore. That is not to say that the Church should regard itself as a political institution entering into competition with other political institutions, or that it has its own political processes. Nor is it to say that our Church seeks political leadership. I am talking of something more profound, something more in keeping with the Gospel. I am talking about an authentic option for the poor, of becoming incarnate in their world, of proclaiming the good news to them, of giving them hope, of encouraging them to engage in a liberating praxis, of defending their cause and of sharing their fate. The Church's option for the poor explains the political dimension of the faith in its fundamentals and its basic outline. Because the Church has opted for the truly poor... oppressed and repressed, the Church lives in the political world and it fulfils itself as Church also through politics.¹⁷

In other words, for the Church, to be political or involved in politics simply means prophetically standing in solidarity with the oppressed poor, helping them liberate themselves from the bondage of any oppression and denouncing its causes. In this sense, being political is a noble call and becomes a constitutive part of its prophetic missionary commitment.

b) Being Political in the Defense and Service of Justice

For the Church, its being political is born of and for the defense and service of justice for all – human dignity and creation – as planned by God who is fully revealed in and through the person of Jesus Christ. As a continuation of God's liberative mission (*missio Dei*), one of the Church's *raison d'etres* is to uphold justice and liberate the human race from any oppression, as resoundingly affirmed by the Synod of Bishops in *Justice in the World*:

Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation..... *The Church has received from Christ the mission of preaching the Gospel message, which contains a call to people to turn away from sin to the love of the Father, universal kinship and a consequent demand for justice in the world. This is the reason why the Church has the right, indeed the duty, to proclaim justice on the social, national and international level, and to denounce instances of injustice, when the fundamental rights of people and their very salvation demand it* [Italics are from me].¹⁸

Commenting on the Bishops' document quoted above, Leonardo Boff says that the bishops here do not view justice as an integral or a central theme but rather a *constitutive*

¹⁵ Medina Gonzalo Villagràn, "Manchase Las Manos en El Escenario Politico," in *Saltarrae: Revista de Teología Pastoral* (Santander, España, No. 1.180, Julio-Agosto 2013), p. 620

¹⁶ Romero Archbishop Oscar, *Ibid.*, p. 298.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Word Synod of Catholic Bishops, *Justice in the World* (Rome, November 6, 1971), No. 6 and 36.

element of preaching the Gospel of Christ to liberate the human race from every oppressive situation. Therefore, there would be no Gospel of Jesus Christ without the preaching of justice. However, Leonardo continues, this is not to politicize the Church but it is simply to be faithful. If we are not faithful, we mutilate the heart of Jesus' message and we pervert the very mission of the Church.¹⁹

c) Being Political Flows from the Core of Christian Faith

While politicians in the secular world often associate politics with something dirty, lies or manipulation, the politics which the Church wishes to get involved with is noble. At Puebla the Catholic bishops even claimed that the political presence of the Church in the world flows from the very core of the Christian faith: "Indeed, the need for the presence of the Church in politics comes from the depths of the Christian faith: the Lordship of Christ extends eternally. Christ seals the ultimate brotherhood of mankind, every man is as good as another: "You are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).²⁰ Commenting on Puebla Document No. 516, Leonardo Boff says that the Church finally confirms the inclusion of the Lordship of Jesus over politics. Jesus is Lord of everything including the Lord of socio-economics and politics. Moreover, politics can even be traced to the heart of the Church's missionary commitment of serving the Kingdom of God. As politics in this sense, Leonardo Boff explains it this way:

[At Puebla Document No.615] politics is understood [by the Church – the Catholic Bishops of Latin America under the leadership of the pope] in the context of the lordship of Jesus Christ. He is not only the Lord of small places like the [human] heart, the soul, the Church; He is the cosmic Lord, [and the Lord] of large places like that of politics. Politics has to do with the Kingdom of God because *it [politics] has to do with justice, a messianic good* [italics are from me]. Primitive Christians professing "Jesus is Lord" were [in fact] making a political statement.²¹

Anchored in the Church's teachings in *Lumen Gentium* 34 and *Octogesima Adveniens* 46,²² Leonardo Boff further says that the Church's interest in politics is a way of worshiping God and in doing so the Church at the same time sanctifies the world to God. For the Church, to practice politics is to struggle for the justice of all, and to struggle for and achieve justice is to give glory to God. Thus, the Church's political commitment expresses true Christian love that has found its social dimension in solidarity with other human beings.²³ In order to avoid confusion regarding the notion of politics meant by the Church and politics that is practiced by state governments, the Catholic bishops at Puebla make a clear distinction between politics in a noble and broad sense on one hand and politics as party politics on the other.

¹⁹ Boff Leonardo, *Church: Charism*, Ibid., p. 23.

²⁰ Puebla Document, *Evangelization at the Present and in the Future of Latin America* (Puebla Mexico, January – February 1979), No. 516. Original text is Spanish. English translation is mine.

²¹ Boff Leonardo, *Church: Charism*, Ibid., p. 26.

²² *Lumen Gentium* 34 speaks of the role of the Catholic laity in the secular world. Through their life as laity and through their various activities in the world, including in politics, the laity have a missionary duty to consecrate the world to God. For further information, see Ecumenical Council of Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (Rome: 21st of November, 1964), No. 34. *Octogesima Adveniens* 46 speaks of the Christian meaning of political activity. For the Church, particularly the laity, Paul VI in the Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens* says: "Politics are a demanding manner – if not the only way - of living the Christian commitment to the service of others." For further information, see Paul VI Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens* (Vatican, 14th of May 1971), No. 46.

²³ Boff Leonardo, *Church: Charism*, Ibid.

Leonardo Boff gives them each a proper name: Politics with a capital letter P and politics with a small letter p.²⁴

Politics with a Capital Letter P

First, Politics in broadest sense with a capital letter P is politics that aims to: 1) search for and pursue the common good, promote justice and human rights, denounce corruption and violence to humanity and creation, either regionally, nationally or internationally. This politics in a broad noble sense, 2) clarifies or spells out the fundamental values of the entire community of people such as internal harmony and external security. It also, 3) reconciles equality with freedom, public authority with legitimate autonomy and participation of all members and groups of the community. This politics in the broad sense also has the task of defining the means and ethics of social relations. The Catholic bishops at Puebla resoundingly affirmed that politics in this wider sense is exactly what is of interest to the Church, its pastors and ministers of unity and, quoting *Lumen Gentium* 34, such politics is a way to worship the one true God and consecrate the world to Him.²⁵

In this broad concept of Politics, the Church tries to help promote the values that should guide politics (with a small letter p) and interpret in every nation the aspirations of their people, especially the desires of those whose society tends to marginalize them. It is carried out through the Church's testimonies, teachings and various forms of pastoral ministry.²⁶ It can be concluded that the whole set of social teachings of the Church and the Gospel itself are Politics in a very broad and noble sense. In regard to this Leonardo Boff makes a strong comment:

The Church has its own vision of the world, of the person, of social life, of the distribution of goods and so on. By proclaiming the Gospel it [the Church] proclaims the Politics of the Gospel; the Church has an interest in Politics and always has had such an interest. The Church cannot cease to be involved with Politics; it cannot be indifferent to the justice or injustice of a cause nor can it be silent in the face of the obvious exploitation of any people. There is no neutrality in Politics; one is either for change in the direction of greater social participation or one is in favor of status quo, which in many countries marginalizes a vast majority of the people.²⁷

What Leonardo Boff convincingly states is not an exaggeration. In the same document of Puebla, an attitude of being apolitical, that is, an attitude of not having interest in the common good and social justice of Christians, whether they are priests, religious sisters, religious brothers or laity, is strongly criticized:

Christianity must evangelize the whole of human existence including its political dimension. The Church, therefore, must criticize Christians who tend to restrict the scope of their faith to personal or family life, excluding their professional, economic, social and political order, as if there sin, love, prayer and forgiveness had no relevance.²⁸

The ideologies and political parties, in proposing an absolute vision of man to which everything is submitted even including human thought itself, try to use the church or take their rightful independence. This manipulation [of the Church], which is always a risk in political life, can come from Christians themselves and even from priests and religious, when they proclaim a Gospel devoid of economic, social,

²⁴ Ibid., p. 27.

²⁵ Puebla Document, Ibid., No. 521. Here I paraphrase the document and the numeration system is from me.

²⁶ Ibid., No. 522.

²⁷ Boff Leonardo, *Church: Charism*, Ibid.

²⁸ Puebla Document, Ibid., No. 515. Original text is in Spanish. English translation is mine.

cultural and political issues. In practice, this mutilation amounts to some kind of collusion with the established [unjust and corrupt] order, even though it can happen unconsciously.²⁹

From the viewpoint of Politics in the sense of proclaiming the truth of the message of the Gospel, therefore, there is no ground for neutrality. Neutrality becomes impossible. Commenting on Puebla No. 515 and No. 558 above, Leonardo Boff says that being apolitical in Politics with a capital letter P amounts to manipulating and mutilating the Gospel of Jesus. Every true Christian needs to become more conscious of the political dimension of the Gospel and of the Christian faith. Politics as proclaiming the Gospel of love, of fraternity, of solidarity, of social, and economic justice and of solidarity has its proper place in the pulpit and in the Mass.³⁰ Leonardo Boff further says: "If our homilies do not touch upon justice, fraternity and participation, if they [homilies] do not denounce violence, they [homilies] are mutilating the Gospel and emasculating the message of the prophets and, above all, the good news of Jesus Christ."³¹

Politics with a Small Letter p

The second type of politics, politics identified with a small letter p by Leonardo Boff, is all political activities that correspond to the administration of society through the exercise of power by a democratic state. In regard to this, the bishops at Puebla affirm:

The realization of the fundamental political task is usually done by groups of citizens who wish to obtain and exercise political power to solve economic, political and social issues in their own terms or ideologies. In this sense one can speak of "political parties". Now even though ideologies developed by these groups may be inspired by Christian social teachings, they may come to different conclusions. Therefore, no matter how deeply inspired by the Church's doctrine, no political party can claim the right to represent all the faithful because its concrete program can never have absolute value for all.³²

Politics with a small letter p, exercised through political parties and running the public offices of the state, does not involve the whole Church but only the laity. In the Catholic Church, political practice in the form of getting involved in party politics and running public offices of the state is the proper place of lay Catholic Christians. Exercising political commitment in the sphere of politics with a small letter p is the duty of the laity. Catholic bishops at Puebla affirm: "Partisan politics is the realm of the laity (cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 43). Corresponding to their lay status, they may establish and organize political parties, ideology and appropriate strategy to achieve their legitimate purposes."³³

As part of the hierarchy of the Church and a prophetic liberative institution, it is particularly here in the activities of partisan politics or political parties that bishops, priests or deacons, religious men and religious women, either as a group or as individuals, are not to get involved. They are to remain as the ministers of unity and offer moral guidance for all. The Catholic bishops at Puebla put it this way:

Priests, also minister to unity and deacons must submit to the same sort of personal renunciation. If they are active in party politics, they will run the risk of absolutizing and radicalizing such activity, for their vocation is to be "men of the Absolute." [Puebla quotes Medellín Document 1968 No. 19 on Priests]: "But in the economic and social order and especially in the political order, where several specific options

²⁹ Ibid., No. 558.

³⁰ Boff Leonardo, *Church: Charism*, Ibid., pp. 27-28.

³¹ Ibid., p. 28.

³² Puebla Document, Ibid., No. 523. Original text is in Spanish. English translation is mine.

³³ Ibid., No. 524.

are offered, the priest as such should not directly concern himself with decisions, or leadership nor the structuring of solutions." [Puebla quotes Bishops Synod of 1971 in Part 2 No. 2]: "Leadership or active militancy on behalf of any political party is to be excluded by every priest unless, in concrete and exceptional circumstances, it is truly required by the good of the community and obtains the consent of the Bishop after consultation with the Priests' Council and, if circumstances call for it, with the Episcopal Conference." Indeed, the current trend of the Church is not going in this direction.³⁴

By virtue of the way in which they follow Christ... religious men and women also cooperate in the evangelization of the political order. Living in a society that is far from fraternal,... they too will have to resist the temptation to get involved in party politics, so that they do not create confusion between the values of the Gospel and some specific ideology [of the political parties].³⁵

4. AUTHENTIC POLITICS AND EDUCATION IN POLITICS

It is far from being new that politics with a small letter p is often full of tricks, dishonesty, fraudulence and cheating. The Politics of proclaiming the message of the Gospel for justice must be distinct from such questionable practices. As recommended by the bishops at Puebla, Leonardo Boff suggests the Church and any Christians in their political involvement in society utilize two primary instruments, namely analytical tools and practical tools:

[First is] *analytical tools*. One must study the mechanisms that generate poverty and violence against human rights [and creation]; the problem is generally not personal but structural. One must read very technical literature to discover how our society functions, what each person has, how prices and salaries are set and distributed, the importance of multinational corporations, and the nature of existing labor or union legislation. [Second is] *practical tools* [italics are from the author]. No desire is efficacious without organization. Thus, there is the importance of organizing centers and offices such as those for legal defense, human rights, justice and peace and so forth. Christians must join in the work of these centers as well as participate in the struggle for justice.³⁶

No success and progress can be attained without education. For successfully participating in both the Politics of proclaiming the Gospel message for justice and the politics that is particularly the arena of laity in the secular world, education is necessary.³⁷ For this purpose Paul VI in *Octogesima Adveniens*, under the subheading "Political Society", speaks about the importance of education for the good of society: "Christians have the duty to take part in this search [of a democratic type of society] and in the organization and life of political society... [And] this [search] indicates the importance of education for life in society."³⁸ The Catholic bishops at Puebla spoke of the importance of Christian education in every sphere of human life, including education in civic life and politics in the broad sense. This was inspired by the Church's social teaching which aims to liberate human persons, either individually or collectively in a so-called human society, from any oppression and exploitation.³⁹ As commented by Leonardo Boff, this Christian education can be considered as politicization, yet in a positive sense. In this education people are educated to struggle for justice, defend their social and economic rights, and free themselves from any oppression and exploitation.⁴⁰

³⁴ Ibid., No. 527.

³⁵ Ibid., No. 528.

³⁶ Boff Leonardo, *Church: Charism*, Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 29.

³⁸ Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens*, Ibid., No. 24.

³⁹ Paraphrased from Puebla Document, Ibid., No. 512-1538.

⁴⁰ Boff Leonardo, *Church: Charism*, Ibid., p. 29.

I would further argue that the Church, its ministers and all Christians, in the process of liberative education have nothing to fear, including any fear of the protagonists of unjust social structures. In the politics of proclaiming the message of the Gospel, the Church, which means all Catholic Christians, in cooperation with other Christian Churches, all followers of other religions and all people of good will,⁴¹ have nothing to hide but together invite all as one single human family to build a truly human community. That is, one in which its economy, its civilization and its destiny that are based on universal values of love, justice and solidarity.

5. RESPONSIBILITY IN POLITICS BETWEEN HIERARCHY AND LAITY

Concretely, how does the Church carry out the prophetic liberative mission of the politics of the Gospel? The one Catholic Church, whose members extend beyond the borders of a nation state, of ethnicity and of race, is basically organized into three large groups: the laity, the religious and the hierarchy. Leonardo Boff explains the internal organization of the Catholic Church this way: “The hierarchy [is] from the pope [bishops, priests] to the deacon; the laity [are those] who are baptized but do not share in the leadership of the Christian community [especially in the minister of the seven Sacraments except Sacrament of Baptism when any laity can minister to it in an exceptional circumstance]; and the religious [are those] who are somewhere between the hierarchy and the laity, with elements of both [hierarchy and laity]. When it comes to responsibility, religious are considered to be among the hierarchy.”⁴²

a) Responsibility of the Hierarchy in Gospel Politics

It must be noted that the Church does not dislike nor have a contrary attitude toward politics with a small letter p carried out within the temporal order of any state. Rather, the Church views state politics positively as long as it aims to serve the common good of society and assures that the dignity of every human person is respected as pointed out by the bishops at Puebla:

*The political dimension is a constitutive dimension of human beings and relevant aspect of human societal life. It has an all-embracing aspect because its aim is the common welfare of society. But that does not mean that it exhausts the entire scale of social relationships. Far from despising political activity, the Christian faith values it and holds it in high esteem [The italics are from me].*⁴³

The Church will, however, stand up and exercise its Gospel Politics when the common good of a society and the dignity of the human person are under threat. The institutional Church has a responsibility to officially announce anything that is of importance for the world society, for the poor or the marginalized. It has a prophetic liberative duty to denounce

⁴¹ In regard to this, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* says: “This document [the overview of the social teaching of the Catholic Church] is proposed also to the brethren of other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, to the followers of other religions, as well as to all people of good will who are committed to serving the common good ... It is a sign of hope in the fact that religions and cultures today show openness to dialogue and sense the urgent need to join forces in promoting justice, fraternity, peace and the growth of the human person” [italics here are original from the *Compendium of Social Doctrine of the Church*]. For further information, see Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), No. 12.

⁴² Boff Leonardo, *Church: Charism*, Ibid.

⁴³ Puebla Document, Ibid., No. 513-514. Original text is in Spanish. English translation is mine

anything against humanity such as socio-economic injustice, oppression of the poor, excessive exploitation of the earth and an abusive application of science and technology at the expense of human beings and to the detriment of creation. It has a prophetic liberative duty to promote and to defend human dignity, its social, economic, cultural and political rights as well as the rights of creation not to be abused or unwisely used by human beings. In addition, the Church's hierarchy has a prophetic responsibility to read the signs of time and interpret them in the light of the values of the Gospel of love. It has a prophetic duty to be in solidarity with the lay people, encourage them in their life activities and inspire all people of any nation especially those whose nation and society tend to marginalize or oppress them.⁴⁴

The entire social teaching of the Church in various encyclicals, documents of the council, apostolic letters, apostolic exhortations of the pope or documents produced by the Catholic bishops, therefore, such as those concerned with the prophetic liberation of the poor and care for creation and those concerned with human development, is an authentic expression of the Gospel politics of the Church. Needless to say, such a responsibility is a constitutive part of the prophetic liberative missionary commitment of the Church with a crystal clear agenda: to promote love, justice, equality, fraternity and solidarity among the human family that goes beyond the boundaries of any nation state, religion, ethnicity or race.

Gospel Politics Is Not Nostalgia for Lost Power

The Church's involvement in the world's affairs is not a kind of nostalgia for lost power as claimed without basis by many today.⁴⁵ Instead, it is genuinely born out of great concern for the human family that is severely tormented by ever increasing socio-economic injustices and great concerns over its common home – planet earth – that is in peril. Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* clearly rejects a notion of the Church that is closed to itself and the call of many that the Church should restrict itself from getting involved in the world's affairs and limit its missionary activities only to minister to religious affairs *per se* such as to the holy sacraments and preparing the souls of the faithful to go to heaven. In response to this false notion of the Church, the pope in crystal clear words writes: "It is no longer possible to claim that religion should be restricted to the private sphere and that it exists only to prepare souls for heaven."⁴⁶ He further says:

No one can demand that religion should be relegated to the inner sanctum of personal life, without influence on societal and national life, without concern for the soundness of civil institutions, without a right to offer an opinion on events affecting society...An authentic faith – which is never comfortable or

⁴⁴ Cf. Boff Leonardo, *Church: Charism*, Ibid

⁴⁵ Gaglianone Renato, a professor on the Faculty of Missiology at the Pontifical Urbanian University in Rome narrates that in the last few decades, especially since the Second Vatican Council up to this day, many have wondered why the Catholic Church today is so intensely interested in the problems of the world's economy, social justice, bioethics and politics and has not limited its missionary commitment only to religious matters such as ministering to its people – the Catholics. Particularly in Italy, Renato further says, many lay Catholics have often expressed their astonishment and indignation for the frequent intrusion by the Church's Magisterium in what they call "profane" matters. Many of them even interpret prophetic liberative missionary commitment of the Church in world's various problems as a sort of nostalgia for a lost power, as the desire for domination and the will to power which is far from being true. For further information, see Renato Gaglianone, "Evangelizzazione, promozione umana e sviluppo: impegno per la liberazione, la giustizia e la pace" (*manuscripts*) (Roma: Pontificia Università Urbaniana, 2011), p. 1.

⁴⁶ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (Rome, 24th of November 2013), No. 182.

completely personal – always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it.... If indeed “the just ordering of society and of the state is a central responsibility of politics”, the Church “cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice” [original from the pope quoted from Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* No.28]. All Christians, their pastors included, are called to show concern for the building of a better world.⁴⁷

Gospel Politics Does Not Offer Practicalities but Moral and Ethical Guidance

In executing this noble politics of the Gospel in world society, however, the Church’s hierarchy does not have a technical responsibility.⁴⁸ The pope, the bishops, priests, religious men and women in their prophetic voices, guided by the entire social teachings of the Church, do not and cannot offer practicalities of what to do. Nor do they have any intention to run or take over the world’s socio-economic and political structures. With this in mind, while denouncing today’s dehumanizing underdevelopment of the developing countries and overdevelopment of the developed countries by an economic model which widens the gap between those who get benefits from it and those who are left at the margin of progress, John Paul II says that the Church cannot offer concrete solutions and it is not the task of the Church to do so. In *Redemptoris Missio* – on the permanent validity of the Church’s missionary mandate – (1990) he says, for instance, in this regard: “It is not the Church’s mission to work directly on the economic, technical or political levels, or to contribute materially to development. Rather, her mission consists essentially in offering people an opportunity not to “have more” but to “be more” [emphasis is original from the pope] by awakening their consciences through the Gospel.”⁴⁹ Or in *Ecclesia in Asia* (1999) he also writes:

In seeking to bring about this change, “the Church does not have technical solutions to offer”, but “offers her first contribution to the solution of the urgent problem of development when she proclaims the truth about Christ, about herself and about man, applying this truth to a concrete situation” [original from the pope quoted from Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* No. 41]. After all, human development is never a merely technical or economic question; it is fundamentally a human and moral question.⁵⁰

Pope Benedict XVI in *Deus Caritas Est* and Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* are also very clear in their stand on this matter. Both popes argue that it is not the immediate responsibility of the Church to find and offer concrete solutions of the world’s socio-economic problems but that of the state and the entire world’s society. The main task of the Church as a prophetic institution in the midst and as part of the world society is to offer a moral conscience and ethical guidance for the world’s socio-economic and political structures. This is the Church’s particular contribution and it is its prophetic liberative duty. In regard to this stand each of the popes writes:

The just ordering of society and the State is a central responsibility of politics. As Augustine once said, a State which is not governed according to justice would be just a bunch of thieves: “*Remota itaque iustitia quid sunt regna nisi magna latrocinia*” [italic is original from the pope quoted from *De Civitate Dei*, IV, 4: CCL 47, 102.]? Justice is both the aim and the intrinsic criterion of all politics. Politics is more

⁴⁷ Ibid., No. 183.

⁴⁸ Cf. Boff Leonardo, *Church: Charism*, Ibid.

⁴⁹ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (Rome, 7th of December 1999), No. 59.

⁵⁰ John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* (Given at New Delhi, India, 6th of November, 1999), No. 32.

than a mere mechanism for defining the rules of public life: its origin and its goal are found in justice, which by its very nature has to do with ethics. The State must inevitably face the question of how justice can be achieved here and now. This is where Catholic social doctrine has its place: it has no intention of giving the Church power over the State. Even less is it an attempt to impose on those who do not share the faith ways of thinking and modes of conduct proper to faith. Its aim is simply to help purify reason and to contribute, here and now, to the acknowledgment and attainment of what is just..... it is not the Church's responsibility to make this teaching prevail in political life. Rather, the Church wishes to help form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice as well as greater readiness to act accordingly, even when this might involve conflict with situations of personal interest. Building a just social and civil order, wherein each person receives what is his or her due, is an essential task which every generation must take up anew. As a political task, this cannot be the Church's immediate responsibility. Yet, since it is also a most important human responsibility, the Church is duty-bound to offer, through the purification of reason and through ethical formation, her own specific contribution towards understanding the requirements of justice and achieving them politically. The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. She has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper. A just society must be the achievement of politics, not of the Church. Yet the promotion of justice through efforts to bring about openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good is something which concerns the Church deeply.⁵¹

Neither the Pope nor the Church has a monopoly on the interpretation of social realities or the proposal of solutions to contemporary problems. Here I can repeat the insightful observation of Pope Paul VI: "In the face of such widely varying situations, it is difficult for us to utter a unified message and to put forward a solution which has universal validity. This is not our ambition, nor is it our mission. It is up to the Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country"[Quoted from PAUL VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, 14th of May 1971, No. 4)].⁵²

By now it should be clear what the Gospel Politics of the Church is all about. It is a prophetic liberative mission of the Church for the entire human community and its common home, the planet earth, by offering a moral conscience and ethical guidance for its socio-economic and political structures.⁵³ Like the prophets in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament, the Church's hierarchy has an ethical responsibility. In the spheres of social, economy and human development and progress, it may prophetically say if something is right or wrong, just or unjust in the light of the values of the Gospel such as love, justice,

⁵¹ Benedict VI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* (Rome, 25th of December 2005), No. 28.

⁵² Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Ibid., No. 184.

⁵³ The Gospel Politics or the political dimension of Christian faith is the theme of the so-called political theology defined as a particular theology that seeks to rethink the relationship between religion and society, between the church and state power, eschatological faith and social practice in dialectical encounter. It is a reality of encounter in which each of the two entities cannot mutually identify itself with the other partner nor separates itself from the other, but both interpenetrate in the same reality of human beings who live in the world. Political theology was already developed by St. Augustine (d.430) in his *City of God*. Pope Gregory the Great, Charles the Great, Pope Gregory VII, Pope Innocent III and St. Thomas Aquinas were all great figures who affirmed that the Gospel has a direct impact on politics and that politics must be inspired by the values of the Gospel: love, justice, solidarity and brotherhood among the entire human family. Based on their conviction of the noble values of the Gospel for human society, they all underscored the Church's right to be political in this sense. A similar thought was later advocated by Erasmus, Martin Luther and Calvin during the era of reformation. Pope Leo XIII (in *Immortale Dei* 1885), Pope Benedict XV (in *Ad Beatissimi* 1914) and Pope Pius XII all suggested that socio-economic and political state affairs are to be inspired by the values of the Gospel. For further information, see Spallacci Luigi, "Teologia Politica," in Rossi Leandro e ValsecchiI Ambrogio (eds.), *Dizionario Enciclopedico di Teologia Morale* (Roma: Edizioni Paoline, 1973), pp. 731-732. After the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), a number of great theologians, both Catholic and Protestant, such as Metz J.B. in his *Theology of the World* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969) and Moltmann Jürgen in his *Theology of Hope* (New York: Harper Row, 1967) also developed a political theology. To provide an overview of their political theology here is beyond the scope of this short article.

peace, fraternity or solidarity that should reign in the life of the entire human family. In regard to this Karl Peschke clearly says:

The Church “has the right to pass moral judgment, even on matters touching the political order, whenever basic personal human rights or the salvation of souls make such judgments necessary” (GS 76). She has the right and duty to manifest her grave concern over evils in the social order, and she may not be accused of meddling in politics if she denounces violations of the moral law on the political scene. Recognition of this function of the Church by the state is in no way [the state’s] subjection to the Church but a recognition of the subordination of both, Church and state, to God.⁵⁴

The Gospel politics of the Church – being political without running politics and social order – takes its model from the liberative mission of the prophets in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament Bible. Both prophets and Jesus launched their prophetic moral liberative criticism and condemnation of unjust socio-economic structures of their time without taking over the social order nor establishing any code of socio-economic and political norms for the society. One may ask: What was the reason? There are a number of possible answers.

According to John Fullenbach, both prophets and Jesus were not explicitly interested in a structural reforming of society because they were convinced that the human intelligence and heart can find and create societal structures that are capable of meeting the challenge of the day in the sense that they would take particular care of the weak and the poor in society. This view is consistent with the general insight of the Old Testament that God is not the only one who rules the universe and human history. God also gave human beings a co-responsibility which they must exercise.⁵⁵ Fullenbach adds that, particularly for Jesus, what he did was to relativize all authority and put it under the judgment of the in-breaking Kingdom of God that he proclaimed. Jesus did propose what is called meta-politics, that is, a system of values and view of reality by which any socio-political context may be judged.⁵⁶

In addition to the insight provided by John Fullenbach, also Kenneth R. Himes, in his recently published work *Christianity and the Political Order: Conflict, Cooptation and Cooperation*, says that Jesus was political and at the same time he was not anti-state politics of his time. The political dimension of Jesus’ ministry was, however, much larger than the state politics. Based on a careful reading of Mark 12:13-17 regarding the story “Render to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s”, Himes draws a conclusion that Jesus was neither against nor supportive of the politics of the temporal power of the state. He says that the first part of Jesus’s answer – Render to Caesar what is Caesar’s – indicates that in the view of Jesus the rule of the state’s temporal order is legitimate as long as it is dedicated to the common good of the society and it is exercised in a just manner. While the second part of his answer – Render to God what is God’s – underscores the teaching of Jesus that God’s sovereignty over human beings and creation is higher than that of the state’s temporal power.

⁵⁴ Peschke Karl H., *Christian Ethics: Moral Theology in the Light of Vatican II*, Vol. II: *Special Moral Theology* (Birmingham: John F. Neale, 2000) p. 625.

⁵⁵ Fullenbach John SVD, *Theology of Liberation: Philosophical –Theological Background and Main Thrust* (Indore, India: Satprakashan Sanchar Kendra, 1992), p. 99. The notion of co-responsibility of human beings is the origin and the theological foundation of the Church’s social teaching on the so-called Principle of Subsidiarity. As for what the Principle of Subsidiarity is all about, I will come back to this subject later in this chapter.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

Thus, Kenneth R. Himes continues, the story of Mark 12:13-17 is not about separation of religion and state or of Church and politics.⁵⁷ He further writes:

It is a mistake to read into Jesus's statement the separation of religion and politics or anything like in our modern notion of separation of Church and state. Throughout the ancient world, either [whether] in Rome or in ancient Israel, religion and nation are understood to be a necessary unity. For Jesus or any pious Jew, God is the creator and Lord of all of life. Those who rule the state have certain rights, but these rights are circumscribed by the all-encompassing claims of God. All that Jesus preached about the sovereignty of the reign of God would make it impossible for him to treat the realm of politics as sealed off from a person's higher loyalty to God. Nor is this saying a biblical warrant for separation of the institutions of Church and state; that reading [Mark 12:13-17] places contemporary ideas into a very different culture that closely allied religious and political institutions.⁵⁸

In other words, Jesus in his public ministry was political, yet his politics was politics in a broad sense that goes beyond the scope of state politics. His was the Politics with a capital letter P that stands for love and justice with God the Lord of creation and history as the absolute sovereignty that all human beings and all creation must be subjected to and not to human temporal politics of state. This was the very reason Jesus did not directly get involved either in the practicalities of the politics of the temporal power of the state or in establishing any code of socio-economic and political norms for the society.

Gospel Politics and the Separation of Church and State

The Gospel Politics or the political dimension of the Christian faith should not be confused with the tenet regarding separation of religion and politics or of Church and state. The Church in its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, one of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, under Chapter 4, subheading "The Life of Political Community," does affirm the separation of the two entities. It says: "The Church and the political community [state politics or the temporal order] in their own fields are autonomous and independent from each other."⁵⁹ Just a line before this quotation,

⁵⁷ Himes Kenneth R. Himes in his *Christianity and the Political Order: Conflict, Cooptation and Cooperation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2013), pp. 45-46.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ecumenical Council of Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* (Rome, 7th of December 1965), No. 76. Henry Peschke mentions a number of legal consequences of this tenet: "(1) The Church has the right to work and to govern herself in full freedom from state intervention.... (II) The Church does not possess any political power over the temporal order. This means that she has no jurisdiction over the political realm, even though she possesses the authority to teach in matters concerning respect for human rights and the moral order in public life.... (III) [On the contrary] the state does not possess any authority over the spiritual, religious order. The state is not entitled to subject the work of the Church to a control founded on state interests. It is true [that] the government ought "to take account of the religious life of the people and show it favor, since the function of the government is to make provision for the common welfare" (DH 3). (IV) The Church possesses a plenary teaching office, which also extends moral laws governing political life. She has the right and duty to manifest her grave concern over evils in the social order..." For further information, see Peschke Henry, *Christian Ethics*, Ibid., pp. 623-625. Apart from benefits of the principle of separation of religion and state enjoyed both by the Catholic Church and by any given state temporal order today, I would say that this tenet was originally made to end the direct political involvement of the Roman Pontiff in Italy and Europe since the Roman Empire collapsed in the 5th century. Both Roger Charles and Drostan Maclaren in their work *The Social Teachings of Vatican II: Its Origin and Development* and Kenneth R. Himes in his *Christianity and the Political Order: Conflict, Cooptation and Cooperation* argue that the Church, that is the Roman Pontiff, began to assume state political power beginning in the fifth century because after the collapse of the Roman Empire. At that time the Church was the only social organization that was capable and trusted enough to reorganize the society and its political order, which later, after centuries of experience, partly incited by the reformation started by Martin Luther in the 16th century, the Church slowly gave up its temporal

the Church also clearly says that due to its particular mission the Church cannot be identified with any partisan politics nor be bound by any political system: “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 [the Church] is at once a sign and a safeguard of the transcendent character of the human person.”⁶⁰

Reading carefully the second part of *Gaudium et Spes* No. 76 just quoted, one should have no difficulty to understand what the Church means by the principle tenet concerning separation of Church and state. That is, due to the nature of its Gospel Politics rooted in the model of sociopolitical engagement of the prophets in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament Bible, the institutional Church, represented by its hierarchy such as the pope, bishops, priests, pastors, deacons and religious men and women, does not and cannot directly get involved in partisan politics or in politics with a small letter p.⁶¹

The Church cannot directly evangelize the temporal order by running its affairs. The pope, bishops, priests or deacons cannot exercise public offices such as president, prime minister, department minister, governor, regent, mayor, legislator, senator or member of a judicial system. Instead, the Church and its hierarchies are to remain a sign of unity, engaging sociopolitical affairs of the temporal order by providing a moral conscience and ethical guidance based on the Gospel values: love, equity, solidarity and justice for all and for every human person, and at the same time the Church has a prophetic duty to stand up and denounce any model of socio-economic and political affairs of the temporal order that violates human dignity and endangers creation.

b) Responsibility of the Laity in Gospel Politics

According to the Catholic Church’s social teaching, directly getting involved in partisan politics is the proper vocation of the laity. It is their prophetic missionary

political power in small letter p. For further information, see Charles Rodger SJ & Maclaren Drostan OP, *The Social Teaching of Vatican II: Its Origin and Development* (Oxford: Plater Publications/San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), especially under chapter 4: “The Ethics of Political Life,” pp. 173-260 or Himes Kenneth OFM, *Christianity and the Political Order*, Ibid., pp. 82-191. Regarding the willingness of the Church to give up its temporal power, *Gaudium et Spes* clearly says: “She [the Church], for her part, does not place her trust in the privileges offered by civil authority. She will even give up the exercise of certain rights which have been legitimately acquired, if it becomes clear that their use will cast doubt on the sincerity of her witness [italics are from me] or that new ways of life demand new methods. It is only right, however, that at all times and in all places, the Church should have true freedom to preach the faith, to teach her social doctrine, to exercise her role freely among men, and also to pass moral judgment in those matters which regard public order when the fundamental rights of a person or the salvation of souls require it.” For further information, see Ecumenical Council of Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*, Ibid., No. 76.

⁶⁰ Ecumenical Council of Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution of the Church, Ibid.

⁶¹ But it also should be noted that as an Indonesian Catholic priest I cannot directly get involved in political praxis, or in politics with a small letter p to borrow a political category coined by Leonardo Boff. This is due to my obedience to the ecclesial legal tenets under its supreme leader, the Roman Pontiff, and not due to the Indonesian nation state. As an Indonesian Catholic priest I still have 100% political rights to directly get involved in Indonesian socio-economic and political affairs, including running for public offices as a mayor, a governor or a regent and no Indonesian state law hampers me from doing so. Yet for the sake of the Gospel politics of the Church that goes beyond the partisan politics of my nation state of Indonesia, I can also be free not to execute my right as 100% Indonesian citizen to get involved in Indonesian partisan politics. Needless to say, my options to stand in solidarity with the poor and care for creation and at the same time denounce unjust socio-economic and political structures in the Indonesian nation state is an execution of the political dimension of my Christian faith called Gospel Politics as well as an execution of civil political rights as 100% Indonesian citizen. This applies to any citizens of any nation state.

commitment to exercise their faith, and the motive of their commitment in partisan politics is not primarily ecclesial but it must be to serve the common good⁶² of the nation state to which they belong and beyond. The Second Vatican Council, in *Gaudium et Spes* No. 75, gives some pointers to right Christian attitudes toward political order and the state they belong to as summarized by Roger Charles and Drostan Maclaren:

Firstly, Christians should be patriotic yet, at the same time, aware of the unity of the whole human race; *secondly*, in politics, they should be devoted to the general welfare; *thirdly*, they should respect those who differ from them on political matters and *fourthly* and finally, they must remember that party politics, while acceptable, must never come before the common good [italics are original from the author].⁶³

The Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* No.33, acknowledges the important role of the laity. Through baptism and confirmation, all laity are directly commissioned by the Lord Himself to participate in the salvific mission of the Church.⁶⁴ Because of this direct commission by the Lord, "the activity of the laity is not an extension of the hierarchy. Lay people have their own place in the Church and they must act within this sphere. The lay person is not a secular person. He or she is a member of the Church in the secular world and has a direct mandate from Jesus Christ."⁶⁵

According to the bishops at Puebla, the place of lay activity is in the world.⁶⁶ Out of their activities in temporal matters, political activity deserves a special emphasis in which they participate in a wide range of political processes such as holding leadership in political parties and holding public offices.⁶⁷ Through their involvement in political activities, the laity, in the world marked by acute problems of injustices, cannot be excused from a serious commitment to the promotion of justice and the common good, guided by the values of the Gospel and the social teaching of the Church. For all Christians, they do not only denounce injustices, but they are also to be truly witnesses and agents of justice.⁶⁸ Finally, in carrying out this political activity, there is no need for the laity to get some direct support or blessing from their bishops or priests to make it characteristically Christian. Their political activity by its nature has a Christian character because all lay Christians are true members of the Church with the appropriate mission in the world commissioned by the Lord himself.⁶⁹ In other words, in order to be true politicians or civil servants and good citizens called to build a just society, Catholic Christians do not need to get a blessing or command from the institutional Church's hierarchy – pope, bishops or priests – since they all have received this mission from God Himself at the sacrament of baptism.

Bearing all these in mind, the fact that many Christians have failed to become the light and salt of Christ in the world through their very state of life as laity, and some Christian politicians have even become the protagonists of oppression of the poor by means of unjust structures, is a great scandal. Recently Pope Francis says: "Even if many [laity] are now

⁶² Charles Rodger SJ & Maclaren Drostan OP, *Ibid.*, pp. 224.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

⁶⁴ Ecumenical Council of Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, *Ibid.*, No. 33.

⁶⁵ Boff Leonardo, *Church: Charism*, *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁶⁶ Puebla Document, *Ibid.*, No. 789.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 791.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 793.

⁶⁹ Boff Leonardo, *Ibid.*

involved in the lay ministries, this involvement is not reflected in a greater penetration of Christian values in the social, political and economic sectors.”⁷⁰

CONCLUSION

It has become clear that politics in its original, broad and noble sense is the organization and management of human necessities as social beings. It is in position of supporting this kind of politics and condemning its pathologies that the very reason of the Church is political. It is in no way that the Church opposes the world’s socio-economic and political systems when they are just and human, respect the dignity of human person and promote the social common good. It is the interest of the missionary commitment of the Church to promote love, justice, equality, fraternity and solidarity among the entire human family which goes beyond the boundaries of any nation state, religion, ethnicity, race and culture but will stand up against these systems when they are on the contrary.

The entire social teaching of the Church in various encyclicals, documents of the council, apostolic letters, apostolic exhortations of the pope or documents produced by the Catholic bishops such as those concerned with the prophetic liberation of the poor, safeguarding of the creation and the proposal of a more human ecologically friendly development is an authentic expression of the Gospel politics of the Church. It is a prophetic mission of the Church for the entire human community and its common home, the planet earth, by offering a moral conscience and ethical guidance for its socio-economic and political structures. Like the prophets in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New Testament, the Church, particularly its hierarchy, has an ethical responsibility. In the spheres of social, economy and human development and progress, it may prophetically declare if something is right or wrong, just or unjust in the light of the values of the Gospel such as love, justice, peace, fraternity or solidarity that should reign in the life of the entire human family.

Whereas directly getting involved in partisan politics is the proper call of the laity. Through their involvement in political activities, the laity cannot be excused from a serious commitment to the promotion of justice and the common good, guided by the values of the Gospel and the social teaching of the Church. All Christians, therefore, do not only denounce injustices but also witness the Gospel politics of love, justice, solidarity and fraternity to and in the world. §§§

⁷⁰ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Ibid., No. 102.