

CONFERENCE SERIES

Wilhelm Guggenberger, Bala Kiran Kumar Hrudayaraj (Eds.)

**Democracy, Religion, and Pluralism**  
**Theological responses**

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**Democracy, Religion, and Pluralism**  
**Theological responses**

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## Introduction

In the last few years, democracy and democratic processes across the globe experienced deep crises and were threatened by several divisive factors; factual evidence affirms such phenomena. Today, less than half the world (45.7%) lives in a democratic setting. The 2021 edition of the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index highlights the continued challenges to democracy worldwide, threatened by the coronavirus pandemic and increasing populist authoritarian alternatives.

The annual index, which measures the state of global democracy, reveals an overall score of 5.28, down from 5.37 in 2020. On the one hand, a minority of the world population (6.4%) resides in a full democracy. On the other hand, more than a third of the world's population (37.1%) lives under authoritarian rule.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the growing inequalities propelled by the neo-liberal free-market mechanisms and hyper-nationalist movements across the world have manifested deep-seated resentment and anger among large sections of the people. These socio-political and economic phenomena have had telling consequences on democratic practices.

A group of young scholars pursuing their doctoral studies at the Catholic Theology Faculty of the University of Innsbruck found it relevant to cogitate the theme: "Democracy, Religion, and Pluralism." The relationship between religion and democracy appears complex as modern secular states require a complete separation of state and religion, often setting them in antagonism. Moreover, an opinion holds religion culpable for existing contemporary problems such as religious fundamentalism, terrorism, racism, xenophobia, and ethnic conflicts, thus provoking the question of whether religion hinders the development of democracy in pluralistic societies.

Unsurprisingly, the answer is Yes and No. Sometimes, religion appears as a help and other times as a hindrance without implying an automatic destructive antagonism between democracy and religions. The problem arises when no respect

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1 Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index 2021 [https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf?mkt\\_tok=NzUzLVJJUS00MzgAAAGDRs\\_VMN-6QCayOgv-LOVrVh8817i37gYU81w6dUxv0rhewJabN7-\\_134ieiuHP7E1YpX59qyB-7w4qk8oEUqlxya1oV7VtnoTCUZwsYEeT9rvBQg](https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf?mkt_tok=NzUzLVJJUS00MzgAAAGDRs_VMN-6QCayOgv-LOVrVh8817i37gYU81w6dUxv0rhewJabN7-_134ieiuHP7E1YpX59qyB-7w4qk8oEUqlxya1oV7VtnoTCUZwsYEeT9rvBQg) accessed on 20. 03. 2022.

is shown for democratic values or human rights in the name of religion or when the political systems suppress freedom of conscience or freedom of religion. The danger also arises when the temporal authorities misuse religion to defend their interests and when religions try to enforce their mission through political power. Therefore, democracy and religion need not be inherently incompatible and antagonistic – quite the opposite.

On the one hand, democracy could be a suitable framework for freedom of conscience, the exercise of faith, and religious pluralism. On the other hand, religion can be a valid partner to a democratic society through its moral and ethical commitment, critical approach, and cultural expression. In other words, democracy, with its impartiality and balance, and religions that are moderate and respectful of others, appears salvific, curbing extremist and fanatical excesses.

Religion can make significant ethical and moral contributions to democracy. In effect, a democratic society cannot exist without the fundamental consensus on the essential values of human existence. Religions have remarkably contributed in this regard, (re)thinking and proffering values and norms that ensure solidarity, human dignity, and the conduct of individuals in society such that even civil laws reflect moral and social consciousness derived from religious sources.

The essays in this book are redacted papers delivered at the doctoral students' conference on "Democracy, Religion, and Pluralism; a Theological response" at the Catholic Theology Faculty of the University of Innsbruck on 12th November 2021. The conference grappled with the role of religions in flourishing democratic processes in pluralistic societies, seeking new insights and narratives towards deepening democracy and democratic values.

The book opens with the essay of Stanislaus Alla, which explores the emergence and consolidation of democracy as an instrument of governance in India. The emerging *othering processes* under the influence of the rising Hindu nationalism in India have caused a severe threat to democracy. However, Stanislaus views the diverse expression of dissent, widespread protests, or claims for space in the commons as signs of hope. In the context of such emerging challenges, the church's mission is to protect the constitution in collaboration with secular institutions and organizations.

In his essay Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Palaver addresses two widespread prejudices. The first claims that democracy flourishes only in a Christian culture. The second

wants to keep religion out of politics to protect democracy. Alluding to Austrian history, Prof. Palaver shows that the Catholic Church did not support democracy for a long time. But with the help of Amartya Sen's writings, he explores essential prerequisites for democracy in cultures outside ancient Greece and Christianity. Democracy does not depend on a specific cultural or religious background. It requires the public use of reason and a tolerant attitude that values other beliefs. Prof. Palaver rejects the second prejudice, noting that religion can hinder or strengthen democracy. He cautions against religious support of populism and promotes fraternity as a vital prerequisite for democracy.

In his essay, Bala Kiran Kumar Hrudayaraj, a doctoral student, explores the concept of democracy as 'public reasoning' as proposed by Amartya Sen. Democracy is not mere elections and ballots but a process based on participatory discussions and public decision-making. Kiran notes that authentic democracy requires more than public reasoning or interaction. Crucial is the place of interrelatedness expressed in the principle of participation, inviting the citizenry towards the path of commitment to charity and justice.

In his essay, Prof. Dr. Wilhelm Guggenberger argues that democracy is a social process that depends on the unending will, intention, and participation of the citizens. Such an attitude implies that the very existence of democracy is always at risk. Prof. Guggenberger indicates globalization, populism, post-democracy phenomena, and global problems that are hardly solved through democratic means. He believes that the guidelines of Catholic Social Teaching offer starting points for overcoming such crises, particularly the principle of the common good. The latter, he claims, forms the basis of democratic structures beyond all constitutional and legal structures.

Stephen Eyeowa, a doctoral student, addresses how religion guarantees and preserves the democratic integrity of a pluralistic polity without resorting to violence, keeping the Book of Joshua from the Hebrew Bible as background. Stephen argues that Joshua's approach(es) to dealing with ethno-religious pluralism could be distilled into a method for modern democratic societies to learn. Continuous strategic reviews and updates appear crucial, facilitating the shift from violence to spiritual conversion, respectful dialogue, and accountable freedom.

With the rise of Hindu nationalism, religious freedom has become a burning issue in India, although its constitution acknowledges religious freedom as a fun-

damental right of every citizen. Chapala Subbaiah, a doctoral student, critically reflects on the rise of the Hindutva ideology propagated by Hindu nationalist organizations who exclusively equate the Indian culture to Hindu culture. Chapala opines that the Hindutva ideology has endangered the pluralistic fabric of Indian society such that Christians appear as ‘foreigners’ and “second-class citizens.” He proposes as a viable option the concept of religious freedom as accentuated by the teachings of the Catholic Church in *Dignitatis Humanae*.

Victor Chukwudobe Mordi, a doctoral student, explores the challenges of democracy in Nigeria since its return from military rule. He evaluates the Church’s role in the Nigerian democratic process based on the ecclesiological principle of “Church as a family” of the African Synod. The Nigerian political class, he claims, has not delivered the promised gains that citizens have paid for with their votes. But as an essential stakeholder in the Nigerian State, the Church can significantly influence the direction of democratic conversations.

In his essay, Dr. Tony Bharath explores the concept of ecological democracy and poses the following critical questions: Why should the Church argue against crony capitalism? What is lacking in democracy? What form of government does the Church envisage? Why is an alternative form of governance important in the Church’s view? His essay explores the trajectory of the Church toward Radical Ecological Democracy.

The printing of this book was made possible by the financial support of the University of Innsbruck and the Jesuit College Innsbruck. The authors would like to thank Christina Mair for proofreading and Mag. Monika Datterl for the technical support.

# Dissent to Nurture Democracy in India

*Stanislaus Alla SJ*

## **Abstract:**

The paper reviews the emergence and consolidation of democracy as an instrument of governance in India and analyses how it has come under threat by the othering processes, especially under the influence of nationalist and religious ideologies. Despite the threats and challenges, the nation sees signs of hope in diverse expressions of dissent – be they widespread protests or claims for space in the commons. To nourish democracy, the Catholic Church in India embraces a new mission, joining the secular institutions and organizations to ensure that the Constitution is studied in academia and help people take pledges to uphold and live by it.

**Keywords:** *Democracy, India, Nationalism, pluralism*

Thank you for this opportunity to make some comments on *Democracy, Religion, Pluralism: Theological Responses* – the theme chosen for your conference. The topics are theologically significant, globally relevant, and have enormous ethical implications. Your efforts are commendable as your papers engage and carry on with this critically crucial ethical conversation. Keeping these topics and the Indian context in mind, I reflect on India's experiment with democracy and how dissent, expressed in multiple forms, can nourish democracy in India. Several overlaps will be there among our shared contexts and the public and theological discourses required to engage in these circumstances.

## Democracy, India's Choice

India is presently acknowledged as the largest democratic nation in the world.<sup>1</sup> Several of us recognize that democracy is one of God's precious gifts to humanity. It focuses on enhancing the dignity and rights of people, their agency, and the ability to participate and collectively shape their destiny. While taken for granted

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<sup>1</sup> See Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi: the history of the world's largest democracy* (London: Macmillan /Picador India, 2008).

in some places and contexts, democracy is prized and promoted by and large. It has been a work-in-progress, and with its strengths and flaws, it does advance the core values of God's reign in a remarkable way.

Diversity and plurality mark every sphere of life in India: landscapes and languages, races and religions, customs and food habits, and everything else. People of different religious traditions, in particular, have been striving to live in harmony and peace despite the attempts to disrupt and destabilize people's lives. In the words of Pope Paul VI, India has always been a land of ancient culture, the cradle of great religions, the home of a nation that has sought God with a relentless desire, in deep meditation and silence, and hymns and fervent prayer.<sup>2</sup> First Indian Nobel laureate and one of the greatest poets, Rabindranath Tagore, echoed the aspirations of millions who longed for truth and freedom:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;  
Where knowledge is free;  
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;  
Where words come out from the depth of truth;  
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;  
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert of dead habit;  
Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action---  
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.<sup>3</sup>

While the aspirations for freedom and democracy in India are legitimate and accurate, questions such as 'are Indians capable of comprehending democracy' and 'would democracy survive in India' have been debated for several decades before India attained independence in 1947.<sup>4</sup> The critics have "repeatedly argued that India's numerous religious, caste, linguistic and tribal diversities, besides poverty,

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2 Pope Paul VI's speech is found in Jacques Dupuis, ed. *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Faith*, Seventh revised and Enlarged Edition (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2014), 437.

3 See <https://thewire.in/culture/rabindranath-tagore-nation-gitanjali>

4 For further discussion on the subject see Bipin Chandra, Mridula Mukherjee and Aditya Mukherjee, *India Since Independence* Revised and Updated (Noida, India: Penguin Books, 2008).

social misery and inequity, growing disparities of wealth, rigid and hierarchical social structure, massive unemployment and multiple socio-economic problems, were bound to undermine its national unity, its democratic institutions and its developmental efforts.”<sup>5</sup> The comments of Winston Churchill who in the 1930s foresaw “the armed ascendancy of the Hindu”<sup>6</sup> were utterly cynical. However, the Dalits and minorities may see, in hindsight, a ray of truth in them. Churchill was emphatic: “to abandon India to the rule of the Brahmins [who in his opinion dominated the Congress party] would be an act of cruel and wicked negligence” and if the British left, “India will fall back quite rapidly through the centuries into barbarism and privations of the middle ages.”<sup>7</sup>

Fortunately, the prophets of doom, including Churchill, essentially were proven wrong. Upon gaining freedom from the British, India opted for a democratic mode of governance. Scholars argue that it is not the British or their rule – which was bureaucratic and authoritarian – but the freedom movement that nurtured democracy so that it got “indigenized and rooted in Indian soil.”<sup>8</sup> Participation of millions in it and the political leadership provided by Gandhi and the others ensured that the “Indian national movement was fully committed to a polity based on representative democracy and the full range of civil liberties for the individual. It provided the experience through which these two could become an integral part of Indian political thinking.”<sup>9</sup>

The Congress party (and the other political parties that eventually emerged) “did not insist on uniformity of viewpoints or policy approach within its ranks. It allowed dissent and not only tolerated but encouraged different and minority opinions to be openly held and freely expressed.”<sup>10</sup> To sum up, it is the freedom movement that “successfully created an alternative to the colonial and pre-colonial political culture” and fostered a “culture of democracy and civil liberties”<sup>11</sup> including that of dissent.

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5 Chandra, Mukherjee and Mukherjee, *India Since Independence*, 4-5.

6 The quote of Winston Churchill is as cited by Guha, *India After Gandhi*, xv.

7 The quote of Winston Churchill is as cited by Guha, *India After Gandhi*, xv.

8 Chandra, Mukherjee and Mukherjee, *India Since Independence*, 7.

9 Chandra, Mukherjee and Mukherjee, *India Since Independence*, 25.

10 Chandra, Mukherjee and Mukherjee, *India Since Independence*, 26.

11 Chandra, Mukherjee and Mukherjee, *India Since Independence*, 28.

The nascent democracy needed nourishment upon gaining freedom, and Jawaharlal Nehru ensured it by establishing structures and institutions such as a functional parliament, free press, and independent judiciary. Nehru made sure that importance is given (not to a person/himself) to the “institutional aspects of the democratic system so that gradually attachment of people to parliamentary institutions grew.”<sup>12</sup> Ambedkar and the other intellectuals provided the nation with a Constitution that constantly attempts to secure justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity, much cherished and enshrined values to all of its citizens. Over the decades, democracy faced various challenges, but it tried to bounce back each time.

Democratic processes in India have been dynamic – allowing themselves to be impacted by various socio-cultural, economic, and political forces—and Yogendra Yadav’s book *Making sense of Indian Democracy* explains them well.<sup>13</sup> Reviewing the book, Ramachandra Guha refers to the three distinct phases identified in the Yadav that describe the evolution of democracy in post-independent India.<sup>14</sup> In the first phase, the elite played the game, and the masses were invited to be part of it. In this primarily ‘top-down’ affair, the gap between the educated/wealthy and the masses remained overlooked. In what can be called the second phase in the late 1960s, Indian democracy, In Yadav’s words, finally had ‘come of age.’ The farmers, workers, and the other middle classes asserted themselves here, and it was explicitly noticeable in the Dravidian movement and the electoral victories of the Communist and other parties. Yadav holds that the third phase started in the 1990s in which Mandal, Mandir, and Market (these three M’s represent the new spaces claimed by those who questioned social inequalities, religious aspirations, and market forces) began to play a crucial role in this has decisively changed Indian political landscape. Within and beyond the three phases, Guha adds that one must also recognize the power and importance of individuals and institutions that shaped Indian democracy in strengthening or weakening it.

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12 Chandra, Mukherjee and Mukherjee, *India Since Independence*, 174.

13 See <https://scroll.in/article/970515/understanding-todays-democracy-capture-requires-rewriting-democratic-theory-yogendra-yadav>

14 For Guha’s review of the book and the three phases mentioned here see <https://thewire.in/books/making-sense-of-indian-democracy-yogendra-yadav-book-review-ramachandra-guha>



## The Othering Processes

In this above-mentioned trajectory, one notices that even though, as a secular democratic nation, India has been celebrating diversity and plurality, Hindutva forces began to disrupt the life of the nation, endangering its collective dreams.<sup>15</sup> A narrow understanding of nationalism and majoritarianism began to polarize and divide people on religious lines. Ironically, while the Hindu spiritual traditions promote and nourish an inclusive and universal religious outlook, the Hindutva forces construct and perpetuate the notion of the other for both survival and flourishing. With the emergence of Hindu consciousness, in 1925, Savarkar and others began to entertain and promote a dangerous thought that India naturally belongs to the Hindus, and the others (read Muslims and Christians) can return to the Hindu-fold or ‘they could stay in this country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment, not even citizen’s rights.’<sup>16</sup>

To suit this project, they came up with the idea of a golden past that was destroyed by the invaders, i.e., the Muslims and Christian colonizers. Distorting and rewriting the history is an ongoing project within this larger scheme. Noted economist Amartya Sen said that the very idea of India is at stake: “The idea of India as an inclusive society is threatened, and we have to do something about it. Things have gone pretty bad. It has taken a quantum jump in the wrong direction since 2014!”<sup>17</sup> By consolidating the Hindu vote bank, the othering process has mainly been successful in the country. There is an attempt to constantly stigmatize and vilify the Muslims and the Christians so that the other, the enemy, is not forgotten. Regrettably, many wings of media play a harmful role in this process. Sadly, we can all agree that the othering processes are going on in most parts of the world,

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15 For an excellent discussion on the origins and growth of Hindu Nationalism and Hindutva see John Zavos, *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India* (New Delhi: Oxford, 2000); A. G. Noorani, *Savarkar and Hindutva: The Godse Connection* (New Delhi: Left Word, 2002), and Ram Puniyani, *Counters of Hindu Rashtra: Hindutva, Sangha Parivar, and Contemporary Politics* (Delhi, Kalpaz Publications, 2006).

16 M. S. Golwalkar, *We, or Our nationhood Defined* (Nagpur: Bharat Publications, 1939), 62.

17 <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/video/election-is-not-just-about-modi-but-the-idea-of-india-amartya-sen-1280821-2018-07-08>

and in place of religion, it could be race, ethnicity, or language that helps to weaponize and polarize people.

In the backdrop of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of India's freedom, vigorously promoted by the Indian government, Suhas Palshikar wonders about the state of democracy in the country and what remedies are needed for its wellbeing.<sup>18</sup> The first of three maladies, Palshikar identifies, is that "electoral majorities are understood to have elected a superhero with unbounded wisdom."<sup>19</sup> Popular mandate, given in the name of the leader, becomes central, and it shifts boundless power into the hands of a nearly mythical person, ignoring that people are expected to elect representatives who are collectively responsible for governance. Directly referring to the Indian context and the Prime Minister, Palshikar alarmingly describes what is happening to democracy: "Not only has he assumed the role of being the representative of 125 crore people, he is also seen as the personification of popular will. This personification is then translated into legitimizing a fundamental reworking of the physical structures of the polity and its normative practices and ideological bases."<sup>20</sup>

The second malady is that the "electoral majorities are seen unabashedly as flowing from, reflecting the majority of one community constructed from many sects and traditions."<sup>21</sup> In this situation, the idea of the nation conflates with that of the majority community, and those who belong to minority communities are slowly made invisible and their public and civic space taken away: "In governance terms, they are being pushed into the shadowy recesses of invisibility while in political terms, they are brought forward as enemies of the nation. This violent discourse produces a slippage of democratic rhetoric into nationalist rhetoric, sometimes juxtaposing the nation against democracy and sometimes conflating the national with the democratic."<sup>22</sup>

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18 For the views of Suhas Palshikar in the essay titled *The 21<sup>st</sup> century challenge for democracy* see <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/the-21st-century-challenge-for-democracy-7704716/?fbclid=IwAR1n2AK7C0MtrsQQDLroKHMU3w02spkOvJOrjupzieDGr2pFc-JtqskZ4PZ8>

19 Palshikar, *The 21st century challenge*.

20 Palshikar, *The 21st century challenge*.

21 Palshikar, *The 21st century challenge*.

22 Palshikar, *The 21st century challenge*.

Finally, according to Palshikar, the third malady is “21st-century manipulations of democracy have almost successfully robbed people’s agency from democracy.”<sup>23</sup> Attempts are made to treat people as subjects and not as citizens, and “people as a democratic force do not exist or at least do not count for much.”<sup>24</sup> Ironically, since much of this happens within the functioning framework of democracy, it is challenging to identify and critique them.

## Role of Dissent and Protests in Democracy

Intending to protect, preserve, and strengthen democracy and to claim public voice and space, several peoples’ movements (also during the last several decades in different parts of India) directly or indirectly manifested people’s agency and will. Students’ protests on university campuses gained much attention a couple of years ago<sup>25</sup>, especially when the central government initiated two controversial laws, i.e., the *National Registry of Citizens* and the *Citizen Amendment Act*. These two were intended to identify the others in the garb of verification and certification. Besides the students, the general public, at times going into millions, have protested against these laws. Separately, farmers protested against the proposed farm laws, and they fought them until the government repealed the laws.

In these protests, one noticed a shared sense of solidarity among the people across the country. Instead of ignoring the issue or imagining that it is not my/our concern, people of diverse cultures and castes, languages, and regions have come forward to discuss the issues and take a stand. In the process, they are ready even to suffer for the cause they espouse. Such public discourse and stand illustrate the activation of collective moral agency and assuredly strengthen the democratic processes.

In the protests and movements, the Indian Constitution remained in focus. Generations of people who hardly studied it finally recognized it as a fundamental resource, an ethical compass to measure and apply for ourselves. It has emerged

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23 Palshikar, *The 21st century challenge*.

24 Palshikar, *The 21st century challenge*.

25 I discuss these protests and make some ethical reflections in a Forum essay found at <https://catholicethics.com/forum/othering-processes-and-hopeful-horizons/>

as common national Scriptures, and at several meetings, people began to read the Preamble of the Constitution meaningfully and devotedly. Such meetings often resembled religious services, where attentively and faithfully, people made promises to uphold the Constitution. The fact that the nation's youth began to discover who they are and what they aspire to be in light of the principles and ethos of the Constitution is commendable.

Spontaneously and intentionally, the gatherings have become interreligious, modelled after the Gandhian non-violent protests. Even though several victims—those who suffered discrimination and violence—were predominantly Muslims or members of other minority groups, people of diverse religions came forward in support. Participants in protests did not hide religious identities but found their strength in respecting and upholding each other's religious identities. Some even took extreme risks, like in the case of some non-Muslims who wore skullcaps -to be in solidarity with the discriminated and the victimized.

Remarkable was the role of women in the protests. When men hesitated to protest, women were ready to take the lead in many cases. Some women politicians like Mamata Benerjee and Mahua Moitra proved to be incredible leaders and speakers at such protests. Even among the students, women have shown extraordinary courage. Some ordinary Muslim women (and others) who never left their homes or spoke in public came forward to register injustices they or their neighbors faced. In sum, the protest movements empowered women to find their voice across the country and among all sections.

Dissent, as a characteristic feature, manifested itself at several protests. People dissent and register their protest when their dignity and fundamental rights are violated, their voices are scuttled, or access to the nation's resources is denied. It is important to recognize 'dissent' as a symbol of a vibrant democracy. In the backdrop of an extraordinary situation, dissenting against the majority ruling and in support of lawyers and committed intellectuals who are being silenced by the current dispensation, Justice Chandrachud said: "Dissent is a symbol of a vibrant democracy. Voices in opposition cannot be muzzled by persecuting those who take up unpopular causes. Where, however, the expression of dissent enters upon the prohibited field of incitement to violence or the subversion of a democratical-

ly elected government by recourse to unlawful means, the dissent ceases to be a mere expression of opinion.”<sup>26</sup>

In a speech delivered in 2016 in the context of the Republic Day, Shri Pranab Mukherjee, the then President of India, said: “Our finest inheritance, the institutions of democracy, ensure to all citizens justice, equality, and gender and economic equity. When grim instances of violence hit at these established values, which are at the core of our nationhood, it is time to take note. We must guard ourselves against the forces of violence, intolerance, and unreason.”<sup>27</sup> When the President referred to the ‘established values’ and asked the citizens to be on guard ‘against the forces of violence, intolerance, and unreason’, it was not difficult to get the intended message. As Apoorvanand said, Mukherjee’s eight-word invitation and challenge to the fellow citizens ‘Let us continue to complain, demand, and rebel’ was what the country needed. The president not only endorsed the importance of dissent in the nation’s life but invited fellow citizens to be critical of defending democracy and civil liberties.

As in many other countries, the notion of the public space or ‘commons’ has been there in India, and it has been shrinking both literally and figuratively. Invoking the jovial notion of ‘poromboku’ (unproductive or useless land), T. N. Krishna discusses the idea of the commons, especially in the light of the public spaces allocated for protests and demonstrations in Delhi elsewhere in the country.<sup>28</sup> He reasons that the claim is not merely for the physical space but space in the world of thought. To engage democracy continuously, people needed the commons, and he argues: “They were the foundations on which we have built our entire nation. Equality, equity, fundamental rights, liberty, justice, and secularism are our shared conceptual poromboku-s. They are not the private properties of a single individual living on this land; neither are they owned by the executive or judiciary. These are

26 See <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/dissent-is-symbol-of-vibrant-democracy-justice-chandrachud-on-activists-arrest-case/story-XEMoJDdq4vi61ONVVy1Q4L.html>

27 In his essay titled ‘*Complain, Demand and Rebel: The president’s Republic Day speech offers hope*’, Apoorvanand discusses the speech of President Mukherjee and it, along with the quotes, are found at <https://scroll.in/article/802591/the-presidents-republic-day-speech-has-given-us-the-license-to-dissent-again>

28 For the essay of T. N. Krishna titled *Unless public spaces are freely available for demonstrations, we will remain a mute democracy* see <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/shaheen-bagh-caa-protests-supreme-court-6716469/>

the principles of our democracy that we cherish and the values that we defend.”<sup>29</sup> As Krishna suggests, dissent is required to claim this collective space, especially to defend our shared values, including democracy. Dissent can foster social awakening and advance institutional and legal reforms.

## Engaging Democracy Imaginatively

Assessing the changes that are taking place in political space in the country at the phenomenological and historical levels is crucial if one expects people to understand and engage them. Badri Raina points to two kinds of political narratives that are being constructed and circulated in India: the first is that “so long as it is still only the Constitution that validates political power in India, we may look at the contemporary moment only as an exacerbated lurch that carries no systemic consequence.”<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, according to Raina, the second view reads “a shift away from constitutional legitimation of state power in the political narratives.” In this shift, the current political dispensation would suggest that the “curtailment of constitutional democracy” results from the “democratic process itself.”<sup>31</sup> In such a volatile context, Raina calls for a second freedom struggle to be guided by people “whose allegiance to India’s secular-democratic constitution remains a matter not of convenience but principle.”<sup>32</sup>

Writing on the importance of civil society and its role in producing democratic counter-narratives, Shiv Visvanathan recommends that civil society “has to see itself as a set of decentralized fragments networking together to create an alternative commons of ideas. Our strength and power lie in the very idea of culture, our commitment to diversity and conversation. It is the argumentative Indian that has to challenge the regime, and the *adda* becomes the first site of dissent.”<sup>33</sup>

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29 Krishna, *Unless public spaces are freely available*.

30 For the essay of Badri Raina titled *As 2022 Begins, Make No Mistake That an Epistemic Shift Is Underway* see <https://thewire.in/communalism/as-2022-begins-make-no-mistake-that-an-epistemic-shift-is-underway>

31 Raina, *As 2022 Begins*.

32 Raina, *As 2022 Begins*.

33 For the essay of Shiv Visvanathan titled *Shiv Visvanathan on democracy, dissent and search for new alternatives* see <https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/opinion/shiv-visvanathan-on-democ->

The challenge for civil society is “to create a costume ball of ideas, a carnival of dissent to the notion that ideas can wear jackboots. An idea is an invitation to a new civics, an invention of new possibilities while a nation-state has become an exercise in mediocre repetition.”<sup>34</sup>

Visvanathan is optimistic that alternatives will emerge in India. They already “exist in the domain of religion, folklore, in the marginalized debates on socialism, in the tribal and folk imagination, in the work of a generation of scientists and social scientists. Our social movements like Chipko, the Anti-dam movements at Narmada, our forest movements, our battle to preserve languages, have also added to this image.”<sup>35</sup> Imagination is crucial to co-work with various constituencies to defend and strengthen democracy vigorously.

Dissenting, claiming public space, and peacefully protesting are complex options, yet they must be upheld. Harsh Mandar, who left his administrative post to work for justice and promote interreligious harmony and faced strong opposition for his stand to be with the victims/Muslims, says that civic response must be creative and non-violent.<sup>36</sup> His inspirational message to the students: “If someone is darkening the country’s future, and we reply in the same language, then we will only be amplifying the darkness. Darkness can be fought only with light. We have only one answer for their hate: love.”<sup>37</sup> In a similar vein, Kannan Sundaram invites fellow Indians to meet intolerance “with tolerance, discussion, debate, peaceful demonstration, and campaigns – which are all, of course, relatively tougher options. We have to draw on the positive aspects of our tradition that have nurtured strong unifying points for different milieus and cultures.”<sup>38</sup>

If Mandar and social activists have given directions on how to engage democracy and respond to the disruptive forces, some others have brought Indian Con-

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racy-dissent-and-search-for-new-alternatives

34 Visvanathan, *Shiv Visvanathan on Democracy*.

35 Visvanathan, *Shiv Visvanathan on Democracy*.

36 For more on Harsh Mandar and his views see Apoorvanand’s essay titled *With Harsh Mander named in Delhi riots chargesheet, Indian democracy has slipped into a dark hole*, found at <https://scroll.in/article/965111/with-harsh-mander-named-in-delhi-riots-chargesheet-indian-democracy-has-slipped-into-a-dark-hole>

37 Apoorvanand, *With Harsh Mandar*.

38 Kannan Sundaram’s views are found at <https://scroll.in/article/884179/as-intolerance-grows-india-needs-a-brand-of-secularism-that-keeps-a-distance-from-religion-caste>

stitution to the center of public discourse. In 2018 itself, the Archbishop of Delhi made a statement saying, “We are witnessing a turbulent political atmosphere which poses a threat to the democratic principles enshrined in our constitution and the secular fabric of our nation.”<sup>39</sup> Several archbishops and bishops, those of Goa<sup>40</sup> and Trivandrum<sup>41</sup> in particular, and many Christian thinkers proposed ways to educate people on the values founded in Constitution and how to ensure that it is critically studied and discussed.

The Church began to make plans to integrate it into the regular academic syllabus. It is commendable that promoting Constitution has emerged as a ministry of the Church. There is a greater awareness that the values and the principles enshrined in the Constitution (liberty, equality and fraternity) are noted equally as the values of the Kingdom. The Constitution has emerged as a common platform for us all to discuss, and it thickens and enriches the public ethical discourse. Its vision and dynamism, and universal outlook appeal to all. The constitution can be appealed to, and we can rally around it.

Apart from the Church, several wings of the civil society began to promote the study of the Constitution to strengthen the democratic forces. Writing an essay titled *Thousands of Villages Across India Pledge to Safeguard Constitutional Rights* on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2021, Sukanya Shantha says that “over 12 000 villages participated in an all-India community-level campaign to instill faith and responsibility towards the constitution.”<sup>42</sup> The movement involves speaking about and holding discussions on the Constitution, making people read aloud the preamble and pledge to follow it. This is a mammoth task but is indispensable if the nation has to re-root itself in the Constitutional values.

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39 For the views of the Archbishop of Delhi see <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/world-views/wp/2018/05/23/delhi-archbishop-in-hot-water-after-urging-prayers-for-indias-democracy-amid-troubled-times/>

40 See <http://india.ucanews.com/news/constitution-in-danger-human-rights-trampled:-goa-archbishop/37444/daily>

41 See <http://mattersindia.com/2018/06/kerala-archbishop-asks-christian-schools-to-teach-constitution/>

42 For the story by Sukanya Shantha and other details see <https://thewire.in/rights/constitutional-day-pledge-rights-all-india-campaign>



## Conclusion

In light of the insights and teachings of the Second Vatican Council, participation in the 'joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties of people' is a task that the Church has given to itself. Recognizing the role and function of democracy and finding ways to strengthen it flows from this Church's self-understanding. Pope Francis often speaks of the imagery of spaces and processes and recommends that the Church involves itself in initiating and fortifying the processes. According to several intellectuals, what is happening in India is worrisome at the level of 'processes' to democracy. It has taken a long time for us Indians to be where we are.

Apart from the many saints and prophets, mystics and martyrs, Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, Rabindranath Tagore and Ambedkar, and countless freedom fighters gave a direction to whom we will have to be as a people and as a nation. They drafted a magnificent Constitution destined to ensure dignity and equality, rights and freedoms to all peoples. These foundational principles and values –taken for granted– are arguably at stake now. Participating and enriching public discourses to ensure that truth alone triumphs, and not falsehood, is the need of the hour, and the Church ought to play its part. It takes time to revive the processes, and people need to trust themselves and the 'others' for this to happen. Dissent, whether it claims space in the commons or manifests itself in protests and demonstrations or art forms, it is essential to uphold so that, in turn, it can nurture the democratic processes in the country.

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# Religion and Democracy<sup>1</sup>

## Wolfgang Palaver

### Abstract:

This article addresses mainly two widespread prejudices. The first claims that democracy flourishes only in a Christian culture, the second wants to keep religion out of politics to protect democracy. A short look at the history of Austria shows that the Catholic Church did not support democracy over a long period of time. With the help of Amartya Sen, we can also find essential prerequisites for democracy in cultures outside ancient Greece and Christianity. Democracy does not depend on a specific cultural or religious background. It requires the public use of reason and a tolerant attitude that values other beliefs. The second prejudice is rejected by showing that religion can hinder or strengthen democracy. The problematic side is addressed by referring to religious support of populism, the positive side by discussing fraternity as an important prerequisite for democracy.

**Keywords:** *Religion, democracy, Austria, the Catholic church*

The relationship between religion and democracy is a complex topic if we choose a broader view. In the enlightenment tradition, I would like to free this topic from two prejudices that are particularly widespread in Austria. The first prejudice is that modern democracy originated from Christian and perhaps Greek roots and can therefore only flourish in a Christian culture. Immigrants from other cultures find it very difficult to embrace democracy for this reason alone. This position is found both among representatives of Christian guiding culture and among those cultural Christians who usually have little to do with the Christian message and have only recently discovered Christianity for themselves to be able to set themselves apart from Islam. The second prejudice is found among more liberal-minded people who cannot imagine a positive coexistence of religion and democracy and to protect democracy want to keep religions out of all politics. The fighting formula of this position is “religion is a private matter”. The first prejudice can be

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1 This article is based on an earlier German version and has been supplemented: Wolfgang Palaver, „Religion und Demokratie,“ in *Glaube – Klima – Hoffnung: Religion und Klimawandel als Herausforderungen für die politische Bildung*, ed. Kathrin Stainer-Hämmerle (Berlin: Wochenschau Verlag, 2021), 87-99.

rejected relatively easily and quickly, at least by looking at Austrian history. As a first step therefore, I would like to look at the Catholic Church's long journey towards a positive relationship with democracy.

## The Arduous Path of the Catholic Church in Austria

Looking back at the relationship between the Catholic Church and democracy in Austria in the first half of the 20th century, we can see how difficult it was to be open to democracy. It was neither a supporting pillar of democracy nor compelling force of resistance against fascism or National Socialism. In 1962, the Catholic sociologist August Maria Knoll pointedly held up a mirror to the Church:

“The Church and ‘natural law’ said ‘yes’ to the monarchy of the House of Austria at the beginning and end of the First World War, on July 28, 1914, and on August 4, 1918; they said ‘yes’ to the First Republic on November 12, 1918, and to democracy on January 23, 1919; they said ‘yes’ to the downfall of the First Republic on December 21, 1933, and to the authoritarian corporative state on December 22, 1934. And what was done in 1914, 1918 and 1934 on the part of the Church and natural law had to be done in 1938 as well. There followed a ‘yes’ to the downfall of Austria, a solemn ‘yes’ to the ‘Third Reich’. It happened on March 21, 1938.”<sup>2</sup>

The ecclesiastical opportunism diagnosed by Knoll was fed by the close relationship between the Catholic Church and the state, the general skepticism of the Catholic Church toward modern democracy (French Revolution), and above all by the self-serving interest in state privileges. In his book *Vom Wesen und Wert der Demokratie*, published in 1929, the law-scholar Hans Kelsen, who contributed significantly to the Austrian Constitution of 1920, saw no possibility for the Catholic Church to open itself to democracy. According to Kelsen, the “imposing

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2 August Maria Knoll, *Katholische Kirche und scholastisches Naturrecht. Zur Frage der Freiheit* (Wien: Europa Verlag, 1962), 38f.

body of metaphysical thought of medieval scholasticism cannot be systematically separated from its autocratic politics.”<sup>3</sup>

Liberation from these political aberrations occurred only after the Second World War. With the “Mariazeller Manifest” (Mariazell Manifesto) of 1952, the Austrian Catholic Church said goodbye to close ties with the state and rejected both any “alliance of throne and altar” and any “protectorate of a party over the church.”<sup>4</sup> With the Declaration on religious freedom *Dignitatis humanae*, such an attitude became established in the Second Vatican Council in the World Church. The Council also made democracy the norm to strive for in the state. Today, the Catholic Church is clearly committed to democracy: “The Church values the democratic system inasmuch as it ensures the participation of citizens in making political choices, guarantees to the governed the possibility both of electing and holding accountable those who govern them, and of replacing them through peaceful means when appropriate.”<sup>5</sup>

Thus, a look at the Catholic Church clearly shows that the assertion that democracy is essentially a fruit of Christianity cannot be upheld. However, if we broaden our view, we can see a connection between the Judeo-Christian heritage and democracy. In this connection, we can refer, for example, to the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, who very clearly pointed out the lasting influence of the Judeo-Christian tradition on modern democracy:

“Christianity has functioned for the normative self-understanding of modernity as more than a mere precursor or a catalyst. Egalitarian universalism, from which sprang the ideas of freedom and social solidarity, of an autonomous conduct of life and emanci-

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3 Hans Kelsen, *The Essence and Value of Democracy*, trans. Brian Graf (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), 105.

4 Cf. Roman A. Siebenrock, „Eine freie Kirche in einer freien Gesellschaft‘: Kirche und politische Gemeinschaft. Zum politischen Handeln der „römisch“-katholischen Kirche in Geschichte und Gegenwart,“ in *Öffentliche Religionen in Österreich: Politikverständnis und zivilgesellschaftliches Engagement*, ed. Jürgen Nautz, Kristina Stöckl, and Roman Siebenrock, *Edition Weltordnung – Religion – Gewalt* (Innsbruck: IUP – Innsbruck University Press, 2013), 69-90.

5 John Paul II, *Centesimus annus: On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum novarum*, *Publication / Office for Publishing and Promotion Services, United States Catholic Conference*, vol. no 436-8 (Washington, D.C.: Office for Publishing and Promotion Services, United States Catholic Conference, 1991), #46, cf. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), #406.

pation, of the individual morality of conscience, human rights, and democracy, is the direct heir to the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love. This legacy, substantially unchanged, has been the object of continual critical appropriation and reinterpretation. To this day, there is no alternative to it. And in light of the current challenges of a post-national constellation, we continue to draw on the substance of this heritage. Everything else is just idle postmodern talk.”<sup>6</sup>

In the following, I would like to follow this trace in a second step with regard to the influence of the biblical idea of equality.

## The Bible’s Equality Impulse

Along with liberty and fraternity, equality is one of the fundamental principles of modern democracy as we have known it since the French Revolution. An important impetus for democracy can be recognized in the biblically emphasized equality of all people before God. In the Catholic Church, however, the equality of human beings before God was, for a long time, explicitly excluded from any application to political conditions. On the left fringe of the Reformation, on the other hand, we can observe, especially in the context of the English Revolution of the 17th century, how Christian communities first practiced the general priesthood of all believers in their church communities and how some groups gradually transferred this to political structures as well.<sup>7</sup> Starting in England, this also influenced the development of democracy in the United States. Especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, we can observe that to this day there is a much closer relationship between Christianity and democracy. Democratic currents in Protestantism are among the pillars of U.S. democracy, while on the European continent there was a radical break between the democratic movement and the Catholic Church in the wake of the French Revolution.

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6 Jürgen Habermas, *Time of Transitions*, trans. Ciaran Cronin and Max Pensky (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2006), 150-51.

7 Cf. Wolfgang Palaver, „Gleichheit als Sprengkraft? Zum Einfluß des Christentums auf die Entwicklung der Demokratie,“ in *Verweigerte Mündigkeit? Politische Kultur und Kirche*, ed. Józef Niewiadomski, *theologische trends* (Thaur: Kulturverlag, 1989), 203-09.



Friedrich Nietzsche, one of the harshest critics of democracy, unmistakably referred to the connection between biblical equality before God and democracy. The concept of the “equality of souls before God” is according to Nietzsche “the prototype of all theories of equal rights: mankind was first taught to stammer the proposition of equality in a religious context, and only later was it made into morality: no wonder that man ended by taking it seriously, taking it practically! – that is to say, politically, democratically, socialistically, in the spirit of the pessimism of indignation.”<sup>8</sup>

So, there is indeed a connection between the Judeo-Christian Bible and democracy, but it is not direct and does not require a Christian guiding culture to support it.

## Democracy Knows Not Only Biblical or Greek Roots

Even though most free democratic states today have a Christian background,<sup>9</sup> it would be wrong to claim democratic potential only for Christianity. Those who do not limit their view of democracy to its Western manifestation will recognize important democratic approaches in other cultures and religions as well. Today, Islam in particular is suspected of being at odds with democracy. In the 9th century, the sociologist and historian Alexis de Tocqueville claimed that Islam and democracy were incompatible.<sup>10</sup> Ian Buruma, a Dutch writer and Asia specialist, has clearly rejected such a thesis in his book *Taming the Gods: Religion and Democracy on Three Continents*. Tocqueville was far too unfamiliar with Islam in its concrete diversity to provide reliable information here. According to Buruma, democracy is neither foreign nor new to many Muslims, and referring to India, Indonesia and Turkey, he states:

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8 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Arnold Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), 401 [§ 765].

9 Manfred Brocker, and Tine Stein, eds., *Christentum und Demokratie* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006), 8.

10 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve, Francis Bowen, and Phillips Bradley, 2 vols., *Vintage classics* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 2:23 [II.1.5].

“Democracy is [...] neither new nor strange to many Muslims. The Indian population includes around 150 million Muslims. Like most democracies, the Indian system of government is far from perfect, but its flaws — corruption, demagoguery, crime, caste-based fury, and so on — have nothing to do with the contents of the Koran. Turkish democracy is equally imperfect, but the ideological ‘secularists’ are as much to blame for its defects as the Islamists, possibly more so. And Indonesia, the largest Muslim majority nation in the world, is now one of the few functioning democracies in South-east Asia.”<sup>11</sup>

In order to show the extent to which basic democratic principles are also present in other cultures, I draw on considerations by the Nobel Prize winner for economics Amartya Sen, which he presented in his book *The Idea of Justice*. In it he draws on ancient Indian concepts of justice with their distinction between *niti* (“organizational propriety and behavioral correctness”) and *nyaya* (“a comprehensive concept of realized justice”).<sup>12</sup> Applied to the field of democracy, it is a matter of distinguishing between a narrow understanding of democracy, which is limited to institutional elements such as free elections and voting, and a broad understanding of democracy, which sees democracy much more comprehensively as a form of “government by discussion”.<sup>13</sup> *Niti* without *nyaya* is not sufficient in the realm of democracy as Sen underscores with the following statement: “Balloting alone can be thoroughly inadequate on its own, as is abundantly illustrated by the astounding electoral victories of ruling tyrannies in authoritarian regimes in the past as well as those in the present, for example in today’s North Korea.”<sup>14</sup>

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11 Ian Buruma, *Taming the Gods: Religion and Democracy on Three Continents* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 86. With regard to Turkey, it should be noted that Buruma wrote this before 2013 and Erdogan’s authoritarian interventions which have intensified since then. However, he rightly points to the previously prevailing authoritarian secularism in Turkey, which indirectly contributed to the AKP’s reaction against secularism. The German religious political scientist Oliver Hidalgo notes that currently only two countries with a Muslim majority population, Tunisia and Senegal, are considered democratic, and Indonesia and Turkey have since lost this status. At the same time, however, he firmly rejects the thesis that democracy and Islam are mutually exclusive: <https://www.gmx.ch/magazine/politik/demokratie-und-islam-34276636>

12 Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 20.

13 Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 324.

14 Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 327.

From the perspective of a broad understanding of democracy it becomes apparent that democracy has two indispensable prerequisites. One is the already mentioned “government by discussion”, which Sen also calls a public use of reason. As a second prerequisite he mentions tolerance by which he does not mean the mere toleration of other opinions but explicitly speaks of valuing other beliefs. As an example, he refers to the Indian emperor Ashoka (3rd century B.C.), who converted to Buddhism, and who expressed such a form of tolerance as follows: “He who does reverence to his own sect while disparaging the sects of others wholly from attachment to his own sect, in reality inflicts, by such conduct, *the severest injury on his own sect.*”<sup>15</sup> In addition to this ancient example of tolerance, Sen cites others that make it clear that this pillar of democracy extends far beyond Western or Christian cultures. One of the first examples comes from the Islamic world:

“When the Jewish philosopher Maimonides was forced to emigrate from Spain in the twelfth century (when more tolerant Muslim regimes had given way to a far less tolerant Islamic regimes), he sought shelter not in Europe but in a tolerant Muslim kingdom in the Arab world and was given an honoured and influential position at the court of Emperor Saladin in Cairo. Saladin was certainly a strong Muslim; indeed, he fought hard for Islam in the Crusades and Richard the Lionheart was one of his distinguished opponents. But it was in Saladin’s kingdom where Maimonides found his new base and a renewed voice. Tolerance of dissent is, of course, central to the opportunity to exercise public reasoning, and the tolerant Muslim regimes in their heyday offered a freedom that Inquisition-ridden Europe sometimes withheld.”<sup>16</sup>

Sen also encounters an Islamic example of tolerance in ancient India which shows how some Muslims were morally superior to Europeans at the time:

“When in the 1590s the great Mughal emperor Akbar was making his pronouncements in India on the need for religious and political toleration, and when he was busy arranging organized dialogues between holders of different faiths (including Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsees, Jains, Jews and even atheists), the Inquisitions were still very

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted in: Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 75.

<sup>16</sup> Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 333.

active in Europe. Giordano Bruno was burnt at the stake in Rome for heresy in 1600, even when Akbar was lecturing in Agra on toleration and the need for dialogue across the borders of religions and ethnicities.”<sup>17</sup>

In addition to tolerance, as already mentioned, government through discussion is a basic requirement of any democracy. Sen cites Buddhist councils in India to settle disputes between differing views on social and religious matters. For example, the aforementioned Emperor Ashoka hosted the third and largest Buddhist council. Finally, reference can be made to the 7th century Buddhist prince Shotoku in Japan who explicitly pointed out the importance of public reasoning: “Decisions on important matters should not be made by one person alone. They should be discussed with many.”<sup>18</sup>

## Populism and Religion

Religions can promote and strengthen democratic developments but they can also extinguish the spirit of democracy and instead foment hatred and enmity. Today, negative alliances are especially evident with right-wing populists and their friend-enemy-thinking.<sup>19</sup> Inciting religious support, these populists urge for a clash of civilizations. Can criteria be named to distinguish between these tendencies? At the beginning of the 20th century, the French philosopher Henri Bergson already distinguished between closed societies and the open society.<sup>20</sup> He sees both forms connected with different types of religion. Closed societies are based on a static form of religion, as we know it from early tribal religions and as it still characterizes Samuel Huntington’s concept of a “clash of civilizations.”<sup>21</sup> In con-

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17 Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 334.

18 Quoted in: Sen, *Idea of Justice*, 331.

19 Wolfgang Palaver, „Rechtspopulismus in Europa als Herausforderung für die christliche Sozialethik,“ *Amosinternational* 6, no. 4 (2012): 27-35.

20 Henri Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, trans. R. Ashley Audra, Cloudesley Brereton, and W. Horsfall Carter (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), cf. Wolfgang Palaver, “Fraternity versus Parochialism: On Religion and Populism,” *Religions* 11, no. 7 (2020).

21 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York:

trast to this is the open society which Bergson associates with a dynamic form of religion with its mystical core as he believes to recognize it in the example of the Jewish prophets and their struggle for social justice and, above all, in Jesus Christ and his call to love one's enemies in the Sermon on the Mount.

For our present discussion, the Muslim and Senegalese philosopher Souleymane Bachir Diagne builds on Bergson's reflections to counter Huntington's static understanding of religion with its tendency toward enemy-thinking with a dynamic form of spirituality that can help us to strengthen fraternity among human beings. Whereas Huntington understands "identity" as "essentially religious and that it is in the nature of religion to secrete this *petrification* that inescapably leads groups to oppose forms of identification," Diagne discovers a "'decentering' principle," a "fluidity" as the "spiritual dimension" of religion.<sup>22</sup> According to Diagne, all world religions are characterized by this dynamic spirituality that can lead us out of the dead end of culture wars:

"Spirituality is the art of distancing oneself from self, from the dogmatism, intolerance or violence that passionate conviction can engender. In this way, it is profoundly linked to the value of tolerance because it teaches us to be receptive to the varied ways in which truth is mirrored in all things. I should therefore like to propose this theme of truth being reflected in all things as a way of transcending the antithesis between relativism and universalism. [...] To perceive spirituality in religion is to escape from the alternative within which the religious paradigm encloses us: a war *of* religions, or else a war *on* religions."<sup>23</sup>

The last sentence also addresses the second prejudice that I want to reject. It is the war against religions which today often goes hand in hand with the secular slogan "religion is a private matter." Finally, I therefore, want to point out a connection between religion and democracy which shows religions as a support of democracy.

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Simon & Schuster, 1996).

22 Souleymane Bachir Diagne, "Religion and the Challenge of Spirituality in the Twenty-First Century," in *The Future of Values: 21st-Century Talks*, ed. Jérôme Bindé (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 101.

23 Diagne, "Religion," 101.

## Fraternity as a Pre-Political Requirement of Democracy

With Amartya Sen's distinction between *niti* and *nyaya*, I have already referred to cultural or pre-political preconditions of democracy. In the German-speaking world, this insight also finds expression in the famous Böckenförde dictum, according to which the "liberal, secularized state is sustained by conditions it cannot itself guarantee."<sup>24</sup> Hartmut Rosa emphasizes today from a sociological point of view that democracy is based on "a *prior* basis of resonance" that makes a fruitful political struggle possible in the first place.<sup>25</sup> In a lecture during the Salzburger Hochschulwochen (Salzburg University Weeks) of 2017, he explicitly emphasized the religious dimension of this basis of resonance. According to Rosa, the "democratic public sphere [...] only functions on the basis of a fundamental religious attitude."<sup>26</sup> Rosa has a very broad understanding of the term "religious" because he explicitly does not exclude secular attitudes from it. Democracy thrives on a spiritual culture that emphasizes togetherness and thus creates a solid basis for political conflict.

The American philosopher John Dewey, to whom Rosa also refers<sup>27</sup>, and who continues to influence discussions of democratic theory in the USA with his pragmatic approach to democracy to this day, already rejected a narrow understanding of democracy as a mere form of government toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in contrast spoke of an ethical and spiritual form of life: "Democracy is a form of government only because it is a form of moral and spiritual association."<sup>28</sup> Dewey's understanding of religion is, of course, quite different from the traditional

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24 Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, *Religion, Law, and Democracy: Selected Writings Vol. II, Oxford constitutional theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 167.

25 Hartmut Rosa, *Resonance: A Sociology of the Relationship to the World*, trans. James C. Wagner (Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2019), 418; cf. 215-25.

26 Hartmut Rosa, „Leerer Echoraum oder transformatives Antwortgeschehen? Resonanztheoretische Überlegungen zum Verhältnis von Öffentlichkeit und Religion,“ in *Öffentlichkeiten*, ed. Martin Dürmberger (Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 2018), 241.

27 Rosa, *Resonance*, 216.

28 John Dewey, *The Ethics of Democracy* (Ann Arbor, MI: Andrews & Company Publishers, 1888), 18. Years later, Dewey summarized his broad understanding of democracy in the following often quoted formulation: "A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience." John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1955), 101.

theism of Christian churches. But he addresses a spiritual dimension of democracy that must not be overlooked. He defines this spirituality in his social-philosophical lectures in China in 1919/20 as the recognition of every person “that his own welfare is intimately interrelated with that of his fellow men.”<sup>29</sup> He explicitly aims at the well-being of humankind and does not limit this spiritual basis of democracy within national borders. He refers to fraternity and even more directly to friendship in order to define the spiritual prerequisite of democracy substantially. Thus, by way of comparison, he cites the “relations of *friends*” to illustrate that democracy, despite its foundation in the individual as the “centre of conscious life,” presupposes friendly coexistence with others.<sup>30</sup> In 1939, the war triggered by Hitler made the eighty-year-old Dewey once again advocate democracy as a way of life that must be based on “amicable cooperation.”<sup>31</sup>

Closer to our present time and with reference to the USA, the then President of the Czech Republic, Václav Havel, in a speech at Stanford University in 1994, also pointed to spiritual prerequisites of democracy that go far beyond merely formal rules and institutions. In view of the dangers of a possible clash of civilizations, he refers – without abandoning his agnostic stance – to a transcendence to be understood in the broadest sense of the word as a spiritual precondition of democracy:

“The separation of executive, legislative, and judicial powers, the universal right to vote, the rule of law, freedom of expression, the inviolability of private ownership, and all the other aspects of democracy as a system that ought to be the least unjust and the least capable of violence – these are merely technical instruments that enable man to live in dignity, freedom, and responsibility. But in and of themselves, they cannot guarantee his dignity, freedom, and responsibility. The source of this basic human potential lies elsewhere: in man’s relationship to that which transcends him. I think the fathers of

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29 John Dewey, *Lectures in China, 1919-1920*, trans. Robert W. Clopton and Tsuin-chen Ou (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1973), 180.

30 John Dewey, “Lectures in Social and Political Philosophy,” *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* VII, no. 2 (23.12. 2015): 38. On fraternity, see Dewey, *Lectures in China*, 106, Dewey, “Lectures in Social and Political Philosophy,” 13, John Dewey, *A Common Faith*, 2 ed., *The Terry Lectures* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 77-78.

31 John Dewey, *The Essential Dewey: Volume 1: Pragmatism, Education, Democracy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 342.

American democracy knew this very well. Were I to compare democracy to the sun's life-giving radiation, I would say that, though from the political point of view it is the only hope for humanity, it can have a beneficial impact on us if it resonates with our deepest inner nature. And if part of that nature is the experience of transcendence in the broadest sense of the word – that is, man's respect for that which transcends him, without which he would not exist, and of which he is an integral part – then democracy must be imbued with the spirit of that respect if it is to succeed."<sup>32</sup>

Interestingly, even in Hans Kelsen – intellectually close to Dewey<sup>33</sup> – we find a spiritual basis of democracy despite his sharp rejection of traditional Christian metaphysics with its vertical orientation towards God. He knows that democracy requires tolerance, i.e. a friendly relationship with our fellow human beings, which he expresses with the Sanskrit formula *tat tvam asi* from the Indian Upanishads when he asks about the human character necessary for democracy:<sup>34</sup>

“It is the type of personality whose basic experience is the *Tat tvam asi*, the man who, when he looks across at another, hears a voice within him saying: That is you. This kind of personality recognises himself again in the other, experiences the other a priori, not as something essentially alien, not as an enemy, but as an equal and therefore a friend, and does not feel himself to be something unique, altogether incomparable and beyond repetition. It is the type whose ego-feeling is relatively subdued, the type of the sympathising, peace-loving, non-aggressive man, the man whose primitive aggressive instincts are turned, not outward so much as inward, and are expressed here as an inclination to self-criticism and an enhanced tendency to feel guilt and a sense of responsibility.”<sup>35</sup>

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32 Václav Havel, *The Art of the Impossible: Politics as Morality in Practice: Speeches and Writings, 1990–1996*, trans. Paul Wilson and others (New York: Knopf, 1997), 180.

33 Cf. Dieter Thomä, *Puer robustus. Eine Philosophie des Störenfrieds* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2016), 389.

34 Easwaran Eknath, *The Upanishads*, 2 ed., *The classics of Indian spirituality* (Tomales, CA: Nilgiri Press, 2007), 134 [The Chandogya Upanishad 6.8.7], Anantanand Rambachan, *Essays in Hindu Theology* (Minneapolis, Mn: Fortress Press, 2019), 159.

35 Hans Kelsen, *Essays in Legal and Moral Philosophy*, trans. Peter Heath, *Synthese library* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1974), 100.



Indirectly, Kelsen addresses fraternity in this paragraph, which has been one of the basic principles of democracy, along with liberty and equality, since the French Revolution. He even explicitly endorses this “triple star of the French Revolution” when he shows that contrary to an autocracy with its ideal of a leader and the “father” as its “archetype” democracy’s principle is “coordination, its most primitive form, the matriarchal fraternity-relation.”<sup>36</sup> With Kelsen’s emphasis on fraternity he comes – despite his general criticism of religion – close to a religious foundation of his world view.<sup>37</sup>

In support of fraternity the religious communities – of course not exclusively and not only these – have an important task.<sup>38</sup> The “Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together” signed in Abu Dhabi in February 2019 by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad Al-Tayyeb is a good example of this on a global level.<sup>39</sup> Pope Francis’ last social encyclical *Fratelli tutti* builds on this document, broadens our understanding of fraternity, and explains how it “enhances freedom and equality.”<sup>40</sup> He refers to the formula of the French Revolution and underlines the importance of fraternity in its relation with liberty and equality.<sup>41</sup> The world religions have a special obligation to strengthen fraternity in our world: “The different religions, based on their respect for each human person as a creature called to be a child of God, contribute significantly to building fraternity and defending justice in society.”<sup>42</sup>

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36 Kelsen, *Essays*, 105-06.

37 Clemens Jabloner, „Menschenbild und Friedenssicherung,“ in *Hans Kelsens Wege sozialphilosophischer Forschung: Ergebnisse eines internationalen Symposions in Wien, (14.–15. Oktober 1996)*, ed. Robert Walter and Clemens Jabloner, *Schriftenreihe des Hans-Kelsen-Instituts* (Wien: Manz Verlag, 1997), 66.

38 Hans Joas rightly remarks that Dewey’s “sacralization of democracy” is too weak to be able to permanently strengthen democracy pre-politically. Instead of relying on an “empty universalism of the democratic ideal,” what is needed is a strengthening of universal fraternity through concrete religious communities. Hans Joas, *The Genesis of Values* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 119-23.

39 Francis, and Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, “A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together,” (2019), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco\\_20190204\\_documento-fratellanza-umana.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2019/outside/documents/papa-francesco_20190204_documento-fratellanza-umana.html).

40 Francis, “Fratelli tutti: Encyclical Letter of the Holy Father on Fraternity and Social Friendship,” (2020): #103, [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html).

41 Francis, “Fratelli tutti,” #103-05.

42 Francis, “Fratelli tutti,” #271.

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur has seen the effort for fraternity in the abiding of the theological-political which today can no longer be thought vertically for the legitimation of hierarchical order but has also not simply become meaningless:

“If something still remains, it is in the direction of wishing to live together that one must look, rather toward the vertical structure. I mean very precisely in the direction of wishing to live together as the practice of fraternity. I am convinced that there are in this regard, in the notion of the ‘people of God’ and in its composition of perfect ecclesial reciprocity, genuine resources for conceptualizing a political model.”<sup>43</sup>

The socio-political commitment of Protestant Diakonie and Catholic Caritas in Austria are concrete examples of commitments to fraternity that help to strengthen the necessary basis for a humane democracy.

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43 Paul Ricoeur, *Critique and Conviction: Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 105.

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# Democracy as Public Reasoning and the Principle of Participation in Catholic Social Teaching: a Theological Reflection

*Bala Kiran Kumar Hrudayaraj SJ*

## Abstract

Amartya Sen's idea of democracy as 'public reasoning' is not about elections and ballots but decision-making based on participatory discussions and deliberations. Democracy requires more than mere public reasoning, limiting it to superficial public interaction. But given the reality of irredeemable disagreements, deep divisions, and multiple public reasons in a society, the conception of democracy as public reasoning is inadequate, incomplete, and faces severe constraints. Hence, democracy, if it is to be authentic, requires a dimension of interrelatedness that calls every member of a community to commit to charity and justice. The principle of participation provides such a conceptual depth to understanding democracy.

**Keywords:** *Democracy, Public Reasoning, Participation, Amartya Sen, and Freedom*

## Introduction

Amartya Sen<sup>1</sup> is a vocal advocate of democracy. His book *The Idea of Justice* understands democracy as public reasoning<sup>2</sup> and government by discussion, which

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1 Amartya Sen was born in 1933 in Shanthi Niketan in West Bengal, India. He spent much of his childhood in Dhaka in what is now Bangladesh. Post partition in 1947, his family moved to India. Sen did his schooling at Shanthi Niketan, a school established by the Nobel laureate Rabin-dranath Tagore. Later, he earned a BA in economics at Presidency College. Then, he moved to Cambridge University, where he obtained his second BA and a Ph.D. Later, Sen took an interest in philosophy, logic, and epistemology. He was always interested in moral and political philosophy. Sen's primary academic appointments have been at Jadavpur University (Calcutta), Presidency College (Cambridge), the University of Delhi, London School of Economics, Oxford University, and Harvard University. His life has been an academic one, and he has spent much of his time in the university setting.

2 Amartya Sen does not define the term public reasoning specifically. Therefore, we have to infer the concept's meaning from his writings. Sen acknowledges that he is deeply indebted to John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas for their influence on him. However, Sen diverts from their concepts of public reason. Jay Drydyk reflecting on the issue, makes three important distinctions between Sen's public reasoning and Rawls' public reason. (1) While public reasoning can describe all

implies decision-making based on participatory discussions and deliberations rather than mere ballots, voting, and a representative government. The crucial role of public reasoning in the practice of democracy makes democracy constitutively related to justice. Therefore, public reasoning becomes central to realizing democracy and justice.<sup>3</sup> This paper aims to inquire whether this understanding of democracy is comprehensive and whether public reasoning and government by discussion suffice to realize an authentic democratic process. Endorsing Sen's idea of democracy as public reasoning and government by discussion, which are

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attempts at justifying public policies, including flawed reasoning, public reason is a normative concept implying norms for sound reasoning. The capability approach is unsupportive of narrow Rawlsian norms restricting public reason to purely political values. It conceives public reason as relying upon a norm of equal consideration for everyone's good, modeled in terms such as an impartial spectator or equal dignity. (2) In Sen's public reasoning, valuable capabilities conferring advantage or disadvantage are discoverable by public reason and are not immune to reconsideration; thus, capability concepts are neither dogmatically philosophical nor dogmatically democratic. Existing public reasoning can also make mistakes about valuable capabilities, including wrong reasons. Combining capability concepts with the norm of equal consideration empowers public reason to detect unjust inequalities without being bound to any theoretical conception of social or global justice. (3) Sen's concept of public reasoning can also assess how public power is exercised democratically; Jay Drydyk, "Capabilities, Public Reason and Democratic Deliberation", *The Cambridge Handbook of the Capability Approach*, ed. Enrica Chiappero-Martinetti, Siddiqur Osmani and Mozaffar Qizilbash (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

- 3 Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 2; Amartya Sen, *Collective Choice and Social Welfare* (UK: Penguin Books, 2017), 395; Lawrence Hamilton, *Amartya Sen* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 122. Although Sen vehemently rejects utilitarianism as the evaluative space of well-being, he remains in the consequentialist tradition of normative ethics. But he is not a pure consequentialist. He responds to such deontological criticisms by arguing in two ways: first, he states that respect for deontological considerations cannot justify disregarding consequences altogether, and then he shows that his freedom-based approach can adequately allow respect for deontological values without abandoning concern for consequences by incorporating relevant non-consequence information such as deontological respect for rights and liberties, regard for decision-making autonomy, and the agent-relativity of evaluation. Because of this broadening of scope, he describes his approach using such phrases as "consequence-based" or "consequence-sensitive" evaluation, distinct from the consequentialist assessment. Further, he makes one methodological innovation for this broadening possible by evaluating the state of affairs from the comprehensive outcome perspective. The comprehensive outcome describes what happened, how it happened, and who made it happen. With this innovation, Sen's freedom-based consequentialist evaluation can proceed without being burdened by the inadequacies of consequentialism that philosophers have identified in their critiques of utilitarianism; S. R. Osmani, "The Sen System of Social Evaluation," in *Arguments for a Better World; Essays in Honor of Amartya Sen*, Vol. I: Ethics, Welfare, and Measurement, ed. Kaushik Basu, and Ravi Kanbur (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2009), 31.



essential elements of a democratic process, the paper argues that these are not sufficient for realizing an authentic democracy. Although the discursive approach of Amartya Sen facilitates the exercise of political freedom, the development of capabilities and enables the human agency of all those affected to be involved in the democratic process of voicing their views,<sup>4</sup> the conception of democracy as public reasoning and government by discussion remains incomplete. It faces severe constraints in the face of the plurality of public reasons, irredeemable disagreements, and deep divisions within pluralistic societies like India. Conceiving democracy as public reasoning and government by discussion might limit democracy to mere public interactions between the individuals in the forms of debates, discussions, and deliberations aiming at reasoned scrutiny and best arguments and might result in realizing desired social conditions for human flourishing and cooperation. In the face of these challenges, the papers suggest that Catholic Social Teachings' principle of participation, closely connected with subsidiarity, solidarity, and the common good, deepens the understanding of democracy. Democracy, if it is to be authentic, requires more than public reasoning and discursive deliberations. It requires every member of society to commit to charity and justice.

The first section deals with Sen's understanding of democracy as public reasoning and government by discussion, presenting essential elements of the procedural view of democracy. The second section explores the theological foundation of the principle of participation in Catholic Social Teaching (CST). The principle of participation has the idea of *koinonia*, divine communion, as its source in the New Testament. It is closely related to the Christian anthropological vision and the principle of the common good. Therefore, it calls for a more profound commitment to charity and justice, not merely rational discussion and deliberation. The final section critically evaluates both ideas and proposes that the principle of participation deepens the understanding of democracy.

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4 James Tally, "Two ways of realizing justice and democracy: linking Amartya Sen and Elinor Ostrom" in *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 16, no. 2 (2013): 220-232.

## Democracy as Public Reasoning

Explaining the relationship between justice and democracy, Sen, in his book *The Idea of Justice*, defines democracy as public reasoning and government by discussion.<sup>5</sup> First, one needs to understand his account of justice to understand his idea of democracy as public reasoning and government by discussion. He distinguishes between two enlightenment traditions of justice in the West: the ‘transcendental-institutional’<sup>6</sup> approach and the ‘realization-focused’ approach. The ‘transcendental-institutional’ approach, according to him, aims to identify an ideal theory of justice and then, on that basis, defines the nature of just institutions. Sen claims that this approach is currently dominant within political philosophy.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast, the ‘realization-focused’ approach does not focus on an ideal theory of justice or the primary institutions at the heart of its analysis. It, instead, aims to give practical tools to discern between real situations of injustices, focusing on the outcomes realized by actual social institutions. The primary focus of the ‘realization-focused’ approach is to reduce the injustices existing in the real world. “We need to seek institutions that promote justice, rather than treating the institutions themselves as manifestations of justice.”<sup>8</sup> According to Sen, the ‘transcendental institutional’ approach, which is based on the social contract theory, fails to reach the fundamental goal of any ideal theory of justice: creating tools

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5 Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 324: Three meta-principles lie at the foundation of Sen’s normative framework of justice; integrating informational diversity in the structure of normal evaluation, belief that no single moral system is capable of yielding a complete evaluation of a world which has an irreducible plurality of values and attributes of both individual and of the social state they inhabit, and thirdly the deep commitment to democratic value; S. R Osmani, “The Sen System of Social Evaluation”, in *Arguments for a Better World; Essays in Honor of Amartya Sen*, Vol. I: Ethics, Welfare, and Measurement, ed. Kaushik Basu, and Ravi Kanbur (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2009), 31; Lawrence Hamilton, *Amartya Sen* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 122.

6 Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 82; Sen characterizes the mainstream theories of justice as transcendental institutionalism, which suggests two salient features of such a way of theorizing: transcendence and institutions. Transcendentalism, according to Sen, entails the search for a unique set of characteristics of a perfectly just society that would be universally acceptable. The Institutional dimension refers to defining a perfect society in terms of a group of just institutions; S. R Osmani, “Theory of Justice for an Imperfect World: Exploring Amartya Sen’s Idea of Justice”, *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 11, no. 4 (November 2010): 599-607.

7 Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 7.

8 Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 82.

that allow us to achieve greater social justice in the real world. Sen's criticism of the 'transcendental-institutional' approach implies that possessing an overall conception of justice is neither necessary nor sufficient to formulate comparative judgments regarding social justice. This argument is called the redundancy claim.<sup>9</sup> Hence, Sen advocates a paradigm shift in theorizing about justice in favor of the 'realization-focused' approach based on social choice theory, which is concerned with ranking social states and choosing a better framework for reflection on social justice issues.

Having presented the difference between two enlightenment traditions of justice, we need to examine the relationship between democracy and these traditions; the 'transcendental-institutional' approach and the 'realization-focused' approach. According to Sen, there are at least two different ways of thinking about democracy: the institutional view of democracy and the procedural view of democracy. The institutional view of democracy characterizes it mainly in terms of elections and ballots. The procedural view of democracy sees democracy in decisions based on public reasoning, combining participatory discussions with public decision-making.<sup>10</sup> Democracy, for Sen, is not just about institutions of representative governments, ballots, elections, the rule of law within the states, or the institutions at the global level (in the Indian tradition: *niti*<sup>11</sup>). Instead, democracy is about the participation of citizens in public reasonings, discussions, and deliberations to determine the common good (in the Indian tradition: *nyaya*).<sup>12</sup>

Advocating democracy as public reasoning and government by discussion, Sen has been deeply influenced by John Rawls's 'exercise of public reason' and Jürgen Habermas's 'public sphere'. Sen repeatedly cites John Rawls's claim that "the definitive idea of deliberative democracy is the idea of deliberation itself.

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9 Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 15.

10 Amartya Sen, *Collective Choice and Social Welfare*, 396.

11 The duality between the transcendental- institutional' approach and the 'realization-focused' approach is also an essential part of the Indian tradition of jurisprudence. In the Indian tradition, as Sen says, both *niti* and *Nyaya* mean justice. But there is a crucial difference between them: *Niti* stands for "institutional propriety and behavioural correction", and *Nyaya* signifies "realized justice". Sen highlights this dimension of *niti* and *Nyaya* at the inaugural Hiren Mukherjee Lecture delivered at Central Hall, Parliament House, New Delhi, on August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2008. <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/the-demands-of-social-justice/263311> accessed on 08. 12. 2021; Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 20.

12 Lawrence Hamilton, *Amartya Sen* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 122.

When citizens deliberate, they exchange views and debate their supporting reasons concerning public political questions.”<sup>13</sup> He also cites Jürgen Habermas’s broad reach of reasoning and, in particular, the dual presence in the political discourse of both moral questions of justice and instrumental questions of power and coercion.<sup>14</sup> Political participation, dialogue, and public interactions are critical in understanding democracy as public reasoning.

Moreover, for Sen, the crucial role of public reasoning in the practice of democracy makes democracy closely related to the subject of justice. Justice is assessed with the help of public reasoning. Therefore, public reasoning is constitutively associated with the idea of democracy; there is an intimate relationship between democracy and justice.

In contrast to this understanding of democracy, according to Sen, the political institutionalists view democracy only in terms of ballots and elections. He calls this view a public ballot perspective.<sup>15</sup> Such a view interprets democracy entirely in terms of voting and the rule of the majority. Some organizational theorists like Samuel Huntington have compellingly presented such an understanding of democracy. In his book, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Huntington writes: “Elections, open, free, and fair, are the essence of democracy, the inescapable *sine qua non*.”<sup>16</sup> This can hardly be a definitive reading of what democracy is all about. These organizational theorists emphasize the ballot results regardless of what happens before and after elections and how ill-informed the public discussions proceeding ballots were.<sup>17</sup>

As an alternative, Sen suggests a procedural view of democracy that understands democracy as public reasoning and government by discussion. The term government by discussion was initially coined by Walter Bagehot and was popularized by Adam Smith. Sen gives importance to dialogue and deliberation and bases his understanding of democracy on two fundamental assumptions: First, human beings can communicate with each other, and in such communication, delib-

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13 Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 324.

14 Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 325.

15 Sen, *Collective Choice and Social Welfare*, 395.

16 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave; Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981), 9.

17 Sen, *Collective Choice and Social Welfare*, 396.

erations, dialogue, and reasoning can become a common form of inquiry through which a decision is taken in good faith towards the common good of a community. Second, it is possible to understand the demands of rational choices for a society when all members have the freedom to participate, directly or indirectly, in the decisional process, which involves respect for their voice, influence, and rights. Without this process of public reasoning, the public ballots and voting and the institution of representative government become thoroughly inadequate, as Sen himself puts it: “Indeed, the effectiveness of ballots themselves depends crucially on what goes with ballotings, such as free speech, access to information, and freedom to dissent. Balloting alone can be thoroughly inadequate on its own...”<sup>18</sup>

### Realization of Democracy as Public Reasoning

How does democracy as public reasoning get realized in a concrete form in society? One of the central features of democracy as public reasoning is freedom of the press and freedom of speech. The freedom of the media is essential for several reasons in promoting democracy as public reasoning and government by discussion. It promotes unhindered communication, critical scrutiny, human security, and value formation.<sup>19</sup> In addition to that, a free and well-functioning press can play a crucial role in facilitating public reasoning in general: “Evaluation needed for the assessment of justice is not just a solitary exercise but one that is inescapably discursive.”<sup>20</sup> Therefore, one can conclude that Sen’s view of justice and democracy is intersubjective and inter-relational. Thus, unhindered communication with each other in a democratic society becomes an essential part of democracy and justice. The free media become the central means of enacting choices and processes. It is, therefore, clear that for Sen, the pursuit of democracy and justice are deeply interlinked and that democracy understood as public reasoning is a *sine qua non* of justice. Otherwise, as Sen puts it, “discussionless justice” can be incarcerating.<sup>21</sup>

Such a view of democracy has several vital implications on social, economic, and political issues in a democratic society. Sen has argued that no significant

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18 Sen, *Collective Choice and Social Welfare*, 327.

19 Hamilton, *Amartya Sen*, 128. Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 338; Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 155.

20 Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 337.

21 Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 337.

famine has ever occurred in a functioning democracy with regular elections: Opposition parties, the fundamental freedom of speech, and relatively free media.<sup>22</sup> Periodic elections and a free press contribute significantly to a functioning democracy to alleviate famine. A parliament open for critical dissent, opposition parties, and a free press has played a crucial role in avoiding major famine in many functioning democracies. A free and independent press plays a critical role in the proper dissemination of information, formation of opinion, and process of decision making.

Sen's view of democracy as public reasoning is further connected to three critical issues: development, human security, and minority rights. In Sen's writings, development has been an overriding concern and is deeply related to democracy. He vehemently counters the thesis that it is possible to achieve significant economic development without fulfilling the basic requirements of democratic governance. He stresses that the assessment of development cannot be divorced from the lives that people can lead and the fundamental freedoms that people enjoy.<sup>23</sup> He proposes the capability approach as a viable framework to assess such an integral development. Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Gross National Product (GNP), and industrialization are not the ends of development but instead means to expand the substantive freedom of all members of a society to lead a kind of life they have reason to value. When development is understood this way, there is a constitutive relation between democracy and development which demands the recognition of that political liberty and democratic rights as constitutional components of development.<sup>24</sup> Economic growth is vital to democracy and provides the opportunities to make the process of economic progress more equitably shared.

Democracy is also profoundly connected to human security in providing a voice to the deprived and vulnerable. Citing examples of India, Indonesia, and South Korea, Sen thus puts it: "Democracy allows the opposition to press for policy change even when the problem is chronic and has had a long history, rather than being acute and sudden, as in the case of famines."<sup>25</sup> Sen also argues that democracy as public reasoning provides a way out of a persisting majority rule and

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22 Sen, *Development as Freedom* 186 and 187; Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 342.

23 Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 346.

24 Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 346.

25 Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 349.

minority rights issues. He believes that democracy as public reasoning enables the formation of tolerant values, which is essential for the smooth functioning of democracy in general and, in particular, avoiding the possibility of the majority eliminating the minority.

### Democracy and Human Rights

Sen's appeal to deliberations, discussions, and impartial scrutiny, which results in public reasoning as the constitutive component of democracy, is crucial to his view of human rights.<sup>26</sup> His approach to human rights is ethical rather than legal. According to him, all national and international proclamations on human rights use concepts linked not to the positive law but are extreme ethical pronouncements as to what should be done.<sup>27</sup> Human rights are ethical claims which generate perfect and imperfect obligations and cannot be reduced to mere legislated laws. In this sense, they pre-exist the state and have their roots in our shared humanity.

For Sen, the importance of freedom provides a foundational reason for affirming the rights of every human person. "...human rights are ethical claims constitutively linked with the importance of human freedom, and the robustness of an argument that a particular claim can be seen as a human right has to be assessed through the scrutiny of public reasoning, involving open impartiality."<sup>28</sup> Therefore, it is the reason not only to affirm our rights and liberties but also for taking an interest in the rights and liberties of others. For freedom to be included as a human right, Sen suggests, freedom must be significant enough to provide reasons for others to pay serious attention to it. It must meet certain threshold conditions, particularly the social importance of freedom and the possibility of influencing its realization. Human rights as global ethical imperatives have to survive "public scrutiny". Sen sees human rights as part and parcel of his freedom-based ethics. They are not trumps to be used but rather ethical claims to be respected by corresponding obligations.

Sen distinguishes the 'process aspect' of freedom and the 'opportunity aspect' of freedom. The concept of capability captures the opportunity aspect of freedom-

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26 Hamilton, *Amartya Sen*, 136.

27 Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 357.

28 Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 365.

namely, the opportunity or freedom people have to choose and lead a kind of life they have reason to value. The process aspect of freedom relates to whether people have the freedom to participate in decision-making processes.<sup>29</sup> The distinction becomes essential as he relates these aspects of freedom to the obligations towards human rights.<sup>30</sup> In the example where someone decides to go out for an evening walk, ‘choosing freely to go out and ‘being forced to go out’ present an important distinction. Even if the latter ends up in the same ‘realization’, going out for an evening walk that would have been chosen involves a direct violation of the process aspect of freedom since the action is being forced on the person, even though it is an action they would have chosen. The opportunity aspect would be violated if they were forced to do something other than what they would have chosen if they were forced to stay in the house. Regarding human rights, the opportunity aspect of freedom might well be fully captured by the idea of ‘capability’, the real opportunity to achieve valuable functionings, but matters related to the process aspect of freedom demand that we go beyond seeing freedoms only in terms of capabilities. A denial of “due process” in being imprisoned without a fair trial can be the subject matter of human rights, no matter whether the trial’s outcome could be expected to be any different.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, it is obvious why human rights have become central to democracy in Sen’s view. He does not view human rights as legally sanctioned laws but as moral imperatives. Therefore, he is less concerned with enforcement but with the idea of change and transformation and the realization of freedom. Democracy as public reasoning is connected with human rights and the enhancement of human freedom as adequate power to realize a life one has reason to value. Even more explicitly, regarding public discussion and public reason, the viability of ethical claims in the form of a declaration of human rights is ultimately dependent on the presumption of the claims survivability in unobstructed discussion....the force of a claim for a human right would indeed be seriously undermined if it were

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29 S. R Osmani, “The Sen System of Social Evaluation”, in *Arguments for a Better World; Essays in Honor of Amartya Sen, Vol. I: Ethics, Welfare, and Measurement*, ed. Kaushik Basu, and Ravi Kanbur (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2009), 27.

30 Hamilton, *Amartya Sen*, 140.

31 Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 371.



possible to show that it is unlikely to survive public scrutiny.<sup>32</sup> It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that, for Sen, the activism surrounding the promotion and safeguarding of human rights exemplifies the richest form of democracy as the public reason.<sup>33</sup>

So far, we have explored Sen's conception of democracy as public reasoning and government by discussion. Sen gives importance to the role of the free press, several national, international institutions, and movements that provide avenues and spaces and facilitate this public reasoning- that is, dialogue over the generally critical substantive issues that lie at the heart of national global democracy.<sup>34</sup>

The turn to the 'realization-focused' approach to justice using democracy as public reasoning and government by discussion is an essential contribution of Sen to the democratic theory.<sup>35</sup> It seeks to reform, expand, and deepen civic participation in the representative government. However, such an understanding of democracy is inadequate for several reasons.

First, democracy conceived as public reasoning in the 'realization-focused' approach does not give due importance to institutions.<sup>36</sup> Democratic institutions play an essential role in democratic decision-making, which Shepsle refers to as 'structure induced equilibrium'<sup>37</sup> generated by institutional structures. Therefore, both institutional rules and public deliberations are essential to democratic processes. However, we also ought to think about how democratic discussion can produce coherent, stable, mutually satisfactory, and just outcomes-rather than assume that this will happen when we invoke discussion.<sup>38</sup> What is missing here is much attention to questions such as who participates in public discussions, who has the power, how they are chosen, how the process of discussion proceeds, how

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32 Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 386.

33 Hamilton, *Amartya Sen*, 137.

34 Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 144.

35 Tally, "Two ways of realizing justice and democracy: linking Amartya Sen and Elinor Ostrom", 223.

36 John S. Dryzek, "The deliberative democrat's Idea of Justice", in *European Journal of Political Theory* 12, no. 4 (2013): 329-346; Séverine Deneulin, *Human Development and the Catholic Social Tradition; Towards an Integral Ecology* (Routledge Taylor & Francis Group: London, New York, 2021), 88.

37 Kenneth A. Shepsle, "Institutional Arrangements and Equilibrium in Multi-Dimensional Voting Models", in *American Journal of Political Science* 23 (1979): 27-60.

38 Dryzek, "The deliberative democrat's Idea of Justice," 331.

the process produces outcomes, and how different forums for discussion relate to each other.<sup>39</sup> The problem of under-specification matters because, as long as it persists, it requires a leap of faith to conclude that democratic discussion and public reasoning will indeed produce coherent, stable, and just outcomes.

Further, Sen's conception of reasoning is pluralistic. There are two widely recognized problems that pluralism presents for democracy, yet they receive little attention from Sen; moral disagreement and deep division.<sup>40</sup> There is always a possibility of deep moral disagreement where each side rejects the legitimacy of the reasons offered and the values held by the other side. Additionally, a deep division is more severe than moral disagreement because it involves a divided society in which one group can only validate its identity by rejecting the identity of another group. Examples include societies divided based on caste, ethnicity, language, or religion. Divisions of this sort can fuel injustice.<sup>41</sup>

The high hope that Sen places in the reach of rationality are also questionable. After making a difference between Rawls and Habermas's contribution to public reason, Sen himself accepts this fact and notes: "There are many differences in how public reasoning in politics and discursive ethics can be viewed."<sup>42</sup> The centrality of reason to democratic communication needs to be questioned because of its emphasis on the logical argument. The logical reasoning can further disadvantage those for whom this is an unfamiliar or uncomfortable form of communication. Such individuals may include those pressing claims against injustice, and so it would indeed be ironic if Sen's devotion to public reason ended up marginalizing them.<sup>43</sup>

Reviewing Sen's life and work, Lawrence Hamilton is skeptical about the idea of democracy as public reasoning and government by discussion. Despite seeing public reasoning as central and constitutive to democracy and social justice, Sen remains reluctant to define it clearly and maintains that better arguments will always win through more and better public reasoning.

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39 Dryzek, "The deliberative democrat's Idea of Justice," 331.

40 Dryzek, "The deliberative democrat's Idea of Justice," 331.

41 Dryzek, "The deliberative democrat's Idea of Justice," 332.

42 Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 336.

43 Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 333.

If one critique remains justified, it is Sen's too much faith in the reach of human reason only.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, the argument that human reasoning could overcome all human challenges in a democratic system is contestable. In reviewing Tagore's foundational influence on Sen's thinking, Abraham Khan noted that Tagore conceived the human person as having two polarities that must be kept in harmony. At one pole, the strength is "in the fullness of its community with all things. . . . At the other, the strength is in self-transcendence in which the self reveals to itself its meaning."<sup>45</sup> Khan concluded that Sen had given much more weight to the pole of the self, which reveals meaning through its power, than to the pole of the self that is oriented towards communion with others. For Tagore, man is a spiritual being whose meaning also comes from beyond himself through, among other ways, art and poetry.<sup>46</sup> In his social encyclical, *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis argues that to address complex socio-environmental challenges, "no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out."<sup>47</sup> This includes science and technology and religious traditions and their wisdom. The following section explores one such religious tradition, namely Catholic Social Teaching and its principle of participation which could enrich and deepen Sen's understanding of democracy as public reasoning and government by discussion. On the other hand, Sen's understanding of democracy could also challenge and help the church grow in democratic values.

## The Principle of Participation in Catholic Social Teaching

*The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* defines participation as "the characteristic implication of subsidiarity, which is essentially expressed in a series of activities using which the citizen, either as an individual or in association with others, whether directly or through representation, contributes to the cultural, economic, political and social life of the civil community to which they belong.

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44 Séverine Deneulin, *Human Development and the Catholic Social Tradition; Towards an Integral Ecology* (Routledge Taylor & Francis Group: London, New York, 2021), 78.

45 Abraham H Khan, "Postulating an Affinity: Amartya Sen on Capability and Tagore", in *Annals of Neurosciences* 19, no. 1 (2021): 3-7.

46 Deneulin, *Human Development and the Catholic Social Tradition; Towards an Integral Ecology*, 78.

47 Francis, Pope, *Laudato si'*, 63.

Participation is a duty to be fulfilled consciously by all, with responsibility and a view of the common good.”<sup>48</sup> Participation is not restricted to the mere political sphere only. Participation in Catholic Social Teaching has a much broader and more profound meaning than mere participation in political processes. It covers all dimensions of social life and is geared towards integral growth. Therefore, it becomes necessary to encourage the participation of the most disadvantaged above all.

The Catholic Social Teaching accepts the Aristotelean conception of the human person as a social and political animal. This communitarian dimension implies that different kinds of groups substantially shape an individual’s identity. This conception of relational identity necessarily means that an individual actively participates in a social group. It further means that our moral and political judgments have to consider this relational dimension of an individual.<sup>49</sup>

### The Theological Foundation of Participation

The principle of participation in the Catholic social tradition has a specific Christian understanding. The New Testament provides a theological foundation for the principle of participation with the term *koinonia*, which means communion. It is the basis for understanding the church. The concept of *koinonia* is rooted in the contemplation of the Holy Trinity. The very being of God is *koinonia*, sharing of divine life by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *Koinonia* is the eternal exchange of gifts between the three divine Persons. With the incarnation, Jesus enables us to enter into the divine *koinonia*, the divine life, and thus to have a share of it. The whole salvation design is nothing but an offer to participate in the divine life.

More importantly, the Eucharist means to “partake of the table of the Lord” and participate in the body of the risen Lord. Therefore, participation (*metechein*) means our integration and transformation into the body of Christ (1Cor 10; 16-

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48 Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of The Social Doctrine of The Church* (London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2005), 96.

49 Daniel Bell, “Communitarianism”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/communitarianism/>>. Accessed on 08.12.2021.

21).<sup>50</sup> This serves as an essential theological foundation for the principle of participation in the Catholic social tradition.

Participation, in this sense, is a divine commission for human beings to participate in the ongoing salvific history as co-creators with God. Therefore, participation outlines the fulfillment of our existence and the final goal of our journey as human persons. Participation in divine life begins through the reception of sacraments and a life ordered with charity and justice. It is an indication of our spiritual nature. Nobody is excluded from participation in the divine life. It is a gift of graciousness and an offer of salvation. It meets our human freedom. We may accept it freely or refuse it. Participation, which implies an act of personal commitment, cannot be imposed.<sup>51</sup> A transposition of *koinonia* to our analysis of participation in political life would mean that we understand participation as accepting a gift, something given, that we need but that we may refuse. Participation is, by theological implications, a fundamental way of being a person in a community.

Philosophically speaking, participation involves the reality of our existence as human persons in a community.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, an individual flourishes as a human person by participating in a community. This is achieved through human freedom, which is given to us for morality – for a higher spiritual law, and order of existence. The human being is not simply an individual substance of a rational nature; she is a free agent who is simultaneously the subject and object of deliberate action. Taking Kant’s categorical imperative and adapting it to the Gospel, Pope John Paul II states, “whenever a person is the object of your activity, remember that you may not treat that person as only the means to an end, as an instrument, but also allow for the fact that they too have or at least should have distinct personal ends. This principle, thus formulated, lies at the basis of all the human freedoms.”<sup>53</sup> Human freedom consists of the human ability for self-deter-

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50 Roland Minnerath, “The Human Right to Full Participation in Society,” in *Towards a Participatory Society: New Roads to Social and Cultural Integration* ed. P. Donati (Vatican City: The Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2017): 49-59.

51 “The Human Right to Full Participation in Society,” 49-59.

52 Meghan, Clark, “Integrating Human Rights: Participation in John Paul II, Catholic Social Thought and Amartya Sen,” In *Political Theology* 8, no. 3 (2007): 299.

53 Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H.T. Willets (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981), 22.

mination, self-possession, self-consciousness, and self-actualization. Therefore, participation is related to the human person, dignity, and freedom.

Human freedom allows men and women to exist and interact with other human beings and engage in group activities while remaining an independent entity. Self-determination, self-actualization, and self-consciousness are the three capacities that highlight the ability of the human person to be simultaneously subject and object. They allow the human person to be called a “self” naturally.<sup>54</sup> From this, it could be inferred that participation is more than mere public discussions and deliberations. Human persons are existentially interrelated. The public discussions and deliberations are just one dimension of this interrelatedness.

### Participation: Solidarity, Opposition, and Alienation

*The compendium of The Social Doctrine of the Church* states clearly that the principle of participation in the Catholic social tradition is not restricted only to political choices and decisions.<sup>55</sup> It implies all dimensions of social life; cultural, economic, and political. The Catholic social tradition values the democratic system since it ensures the participation of citizens in making political choices and guarantees to the governed the possibility of electing and holding accountable those who govern them. Authentic democracy is only possible in a state ruled by law and based on a correct conception of the human person.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, participation provides a measuring criterion to evaluate social conditions, institutions, and social structures, which are supposed to facilitate the participation of every human person in the humanity of another.

Meghan Clark reflecting upon the principle of participation points out two dimensions of participation: alienation and opposition.<sup>57</sup> Alienation of a person or a group of persons is nothing but a negation or a denial of participation to that person or group. As Catholic Social Teaching refers to it, alienation or marginalization is nothing more than dehumanization.<sup>58</sup> The alienation of an individual

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54 Clark, “Integrating Human Rights,” 303.

55 Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of The Social Doctrine of The Church* (London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2005), 96.

56 John Paul II, Pope, “Centesimus Annus” In *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*. Ed. D.J O’ Brien and T.A. Shannon (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York, 2016), 510.

57 Clark, “Integrating Human Rights,” 303.

58 Clark, “Integrating Human Rights,” 303.

human person denies a person the opportunity of self-actualization and the alienation of a group the ability to participate in the humanity of a larger society. It is nothing more than a denial of the possibility of working jointly with others for the common good. Therefore, systems of alienation are not just dehumanizing but also depersonalizing.<sup>59</sup>

For the common good, authentic participation in the community is hindered by excessive individualism, totalitarianism, and non-involvement. Extreme individualism limits genuine participation by isolating oneself from the community and the common good. Participation is not realized if individuals just exist with each other in society; rather, living and relating demands that an individual fulfill certain obligations towards others and contribute to the common good. The fact that one lives in a community puts the moral responsibility on this individual towards others. I, as an individual, indeed owe to my neighbours. The focus here is based on an individual. However, it is not carried out by rejection of community and the common good of society. The expected good flows out of human dignity and the person's self-actualization. Therefore, authentic participation is human flourishing within the community, which implies the ability of each person to exercise self-determination, self-consciousness, and self-actualization through participation.<sup>60</sup> This is more than mere public reasoning and deliberation.

On the other hand, totalism subverts an individual entirely to the will of the supposed common good. An individual cannot freely participate in such a situation, a perversion of the common good and community. Totalism is unacceptable because it limits or eliminates participation. The attitude of non-involvement also hinders participation from an individual or a subsidiary group, which is a withdrawal from the community and the common good. Non-involvement could sometimes also take the form of opposition. This could become a substitute for those who find solidarity hard. If the withdrawal and non-involvements are the only solutions for private and subsidiary groups, this could indicate the prevalence of an erroneous understanding of the common good. Withdrawal from the community is a refusal to act with others and an attempt to save oneself in isola-

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59 Clark, "Integrating Human Rights," 304.

60 Clark, "Integrating Human Rights," 305.

tion. The human person cannot flourish in isolation. An authentic understanding of the human person and human life requires participation as its foundation.<sup>61</sup>

Therefore, an authentic practice of democracy cannot be limited to public reasoning alone but must be understood as the flourishing of participation through genuine solidarity and authentic opposition aimed at the common good. Solidarity is a consequence of the fact that a human being exists and acts together with other persons. Participation in a community is for the common good. Solidarity means the continuous readiness to accept and perform that part of a task that is imposed due to being a member of a specific community. In the catholic social tradition, a human person finds one's fulfillment by adding to the fulfillment of others. Solidarity, on this level, also includes fulfilling one's duties and obligations for the sake of the community and the common good. In solidarity, one must accept and respect the duties and responsibilities imposed on her by the structures.

The principle of participation also implies opposition. Opposition is not placed in contradiction to solidarity and participation but is instead seen as a confirmation of participation because authentic opposition against alienating social structures arises not out of a desire to withdraw from the community and thereby deny the common good but out of the willingness to preserve the common good. Both solidarity and oppositions are an integral part of the principle of participation as understood by Catholic Social Teaching. This is an argument for participation as an integral aspect of what it means to be a human person and for a dialogue between solidarity and opposition in exercising this participation.<sup>62</sup> It implies that democracy as integral participation is much deeper and more prosperous than simply participating in public discussions and deliberations attempting at public scrutiny and best arguments.

## Human Rights to Participation

Human rights,<sup>63</sup> understood as civil, political, social, and economic rights, are necessary preconditions for authentic participation. In exercising these rights, an

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61 Clark, "Integrating Human Rights," 305.

62 Clark, "Integrating Human Rights," 308.

63 In this paper, without going into details, the notion of human rights refers to the rights of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, which were later given recognition by Social Catholic Teaching; Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 26; John XXIII, Pope, *Pacem in Terris*, #48, 51.



individual can act as a human person with other human persons and co-exist in a community. As David Hollenbach points out, “to be a person is to be a member of society, active within it in many ways through a diverse set of relationships.”<sup>64</sup>

Pope John Paul II draws up a list of human rights in the Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*: “Among the most important of these rights, mention must be made of the right to life, an integral part of which is the right of the child to develop in the mother’s womb from the moment of conception; the right to live in a united family and a moral environment conducive to the growth of the child’s personality; the right to develop one’s intelligence and freedom in seeking and knowing the truth; the right to share in the work which makes wise use of the earth’s material resources and to derive from that work the means to support oneself and one’s dependents; and the right freely to establish a family, to have and to rear children through the responsible exercise of one’s sexuality. In a certain sense, the source and synthesis of these rights is religious freedom, understood as the right to live in the truth of one’s faith and conformity with one’s transcendent dignity as a person.”<sup>65</sup> Participation is both a right and a duty in the Catholic social tradition. The Second Vatican Council instructs us: “Let all citizens be mindful of their simultaneous right and duty to vote freely to advance the common good.”<sup>66</sup> As members of a community, human beings participate in the community through the exercise of human rights. When people are marginalized and alienated from participation in cultural, social, political, economic, and social processes, participation requires action on behalf of the marginalized.

Further, it also implies opposition which is not a withdrawal from participation but a meaningful realization of participation. According to Catholic Social Teaching, Civil disobedience is a form of participation. “It follows that civil authority must appeal primarily to the conscience of individual citizens, that is, to each one’s duty to collaborate readily for the common good... If civil authorities pass laws or command anything opposed to the moral order...neither the laws made nor the authorizations granted can be binding on the consciences of citizens.”<sup>67</sup>

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64 David Hollenbach, *Justice, Peace and Human Rights* (New York: Cross Roads, 1998), 82.

65 John Paul II, Pope, “Centesimus Annus” In *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*. Ed. D.J O’ Brien and T.A. Shannon (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2016), 510.

66 Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, #75.

67 John XXIII, Pope, *Pacem in Terris*, #48, 51.

Authentic participation demands all political, civil, economic, and social rights. As Vatican II puts it: “However, there is a growing awareness of the exalted dignity proper to the human person, since he stands above all things, and his rights and duties are universal and inviolable. Therefore, there must be made available to all men everything necessary for leading a life truly human, such as food, clothing, and shelter; the right to choose a state of life freely and to found a family, the right to education, to employment, to a good reputation, to respect, to appropriate information, to activity in accord with the upright norm of one’s conscience, to the protection of privacy and rightful freedom even in matters religious.”<sup>68</sup> When these human rights are denied to persons and subsidiary groups, participation requires taking action on behalf of these marginalized people. On the part of the marginalized, it is a meaningful opposition. Therefore, participation implies both solidarity and opposition. The exercise of human rights is a fundamental way of participating in the life of a society, geared toward the common good and the self-determination and self-actualization of the human person.

## Democracy as Public Reasoning and the Principle of Participation

Having explored the understanding of public reasoning and the principle of participation, we now turn to attempt at integrating these two ideas. According to Sen, public reasoning and government by discussion and agency are central to democracy, which plays a vital role in creating social conditions that facilitate human flourishing. However, Sen’s ‘realization-focused’ approach does not stress clear-cut structures and institutions for such a human flourishing.<sup>69</sup> On the other hand, Catholic Social Teaching gives equal importance to what Sen would term the ‘transcendental institutional’ approach and the ‘realization-focused’ approach. In the Christian ethical method, any social action begins with assessing the situa-

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<sup>68</sup> Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, #26.

<sup>69</sup> We have to also keep in mind that the concern of Amartya Sen is propose an adequate evaluative space of social evaluation that does solely concern itself with utilities in measuring the well-being of individual or goodness of a social context, rather that which facilitates the widening of informational plurality.

tions and the kinds of lives people live, which it calls the ‘seeing’ stage.<sup>70</sup> Further, it is also the institutions and structures that are an indispensable part of the people’s lives. The health of society’s institutions has consequences for human life quality.<sup>71</sup>

In Catholic Social Teaching, the democratic system is a means to the common good. “Another important consideration is the common good. To love someone is to desire that person’s good and take effective steps to secure it. Besides the individual’s good, there is a good link to living in society: the common good.”<sup>72</sup> The good of an individual cannot be separated from the common good. Therefore, participation entails dynamic interaction between love and justice, understood as political love. Participation is, therefore, both concrete acts at the individual level and continual changes and transformations at the institution level.

According to the Catholic understanding, charity and justice need each other in participation. Charity is the motivation to participate in justice, and participation in justice enables love to move from particular to the universal, institutional, and structural levels. As Pope Benedict XVI puts it in *Caritas in Veritate*: Charity goes beyond justice because to love is to give, to offer what is “mine” to the other; but it never lacks justice, which prompts us to give the other what is “his,” what is due to him because of his being or his acting. I cannot “give” what is mine to the other without first giving him what pertains to his justice. If we love others with charity, then, first of all, we are just towards them. Justice is not extraneous to charity; it is not an alternative or parallel path to charity: justice is inseparable from charity and intrinsic to it. Justice is the primary way of charity or, in Paul VI’s words, “the minimum measure” of it, an integral part of the love “in deed and truth” (1John 3:18), to which Saint John exhorts people.

Thus, it could be argued that democracy as public reasoning could be enriched and deepened by the principle of participation. The turn to the realization of justice using democracy as public reasoning and government by discussion is an exceptional contribution to the democratic theory, for it has emphasized the hu-

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70 Deneulin, *Human Development, and the Catholic Social Tradition; Towards an Integral Ecology*, 78.

71 Francis, Pope, *Laudato si*, #142.

72 Benedict XVI, Pope, *Caritas in veritate*, In *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*. ed. D.J O’ Brien and T.A. Shannon (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books: 2016), #531.

man agency in general and the agency of the poor and disadvantaged in particular to mobilize and get politically organized to have their voices heard. *Rerum Novarum*, a social encyclical by Pople Leo XIII, also urged the workers to form associations and unite their forces to shake off the yoke of unrighteous and intolerable oppression courageously.<sup>73</sup> Pope Francis has renewed this emphasis on the poor and disadvantaged by encouraging them to organize themselves in social movements to press for structural change and argues in *Fratelli Tutti*: “Solidarity means much more than engaging in sporadic acts of generosity. . . . It also means combatting the structural causes of poverty, inequality, the lack of work, land, and housing, and the denial of social and labor rights. It means confronting the destructive effects of the empire.”<sup>74</sup>

This closeness to the lives of the poor and the ability to empathize with what ails their lives as conditions for public reasoning about which to take remedial action were also critical components of Sen’s account of public reasoning. Sen called the lack of interest of the privileged in what happens to the lives of the less privileged a failure of public reasoning. The Catholic social tradition does, however, go further by urging that these encounters between the privileged and the less privileged should become part of a culture - a way of life: “To speak of a “culture of encounter” means that we, as a people, should be passionate about meeting others, seeking points of contact, building bridges, planning a project that includes everyone. This becomes an aspiration and a style of life.”<sup>75</sup>

### Limitation of Public Reasoning

Public reasoning and government by discussion are essential elements of democracy but not sufficient for realizing an authentic practice of democracy; conceiving democracy as public reasoning and government by discussion limits it only to the level of public interactions between the individuals in the forms of debates, discussions, and deliberations aiming at ‘reasoned scrutiny’ and ‘best arguments, which may not result in desired social conditions for human flourishing and co-operation given the reality of the plurality of reasonings, incorrigible disagreements,

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73 Leo XIII, Pope, *Rerum novarum*, #54.

74 Francis, Pope, *Fratelli tutti*, #116.

75 Francis, Pope, *Fratelli tutti*, #216.

and deep divisions in society. Moreover, the reasoning of Sen is pluralistic and moral is one of many reasonings and not the only way of reasoning. Sen clarifies that nothing substantive is banished based on rationality as ‘reasoned scrutiny.’ People may view that they should pursue self-interest, just as they may equally likely believe that socially responsible conduct is the best. But on Sen’s account, both things can happen. Moral reasoning may demand something like acting in the interests of others, but Sen stresses that it is only one kind of reasoning and not the only way of using reason in general.<sup>76</sup>

### Individuality and Sociality

The need for reasoned scrutiny, Sen argues, applies not only to accommodating moral and political concerns in personal choices and social living but also in incorporating the demands of prudence. All of these involve the experience and understanding of others. However, Sen tends to remain resolutely individualistic when he argues that, ultimately, the person – the adult, responsible person – must learn from others and incorporate the wisdom that may come from elsewhere into their assessment and scrutiny.<sup>77</sup> There are three vital points of criticism against Sen. He is too individualistic. He does not consider individuals as part of their social environment as socially embedded and connected to others. Instead, he works with a notion of atomized individuals. Secondly, he does not pay sufficient attention to subsidiary groups like family, community, school, and other organizations. Thirdly, he does not pay adequate attention to social structures.<sup>78</sup> To scrutinize the critique that Sen is too individualistic, we need to distinguish between ethical individualism, methodological individualism, and ontological individualism. Ethical individualism claims that only individuals are the units of moral concern. In other words, when evaluating different states of social affairs, we are only interested in the (direct and indirect) effects of those states on individuals. Methodological individualism would claim that everything can be explained by reference to individuals and their properties. Ontological individualism claims that only individuals and their properties exist and that all social entities and properties can

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76 Hamilton, *Amartya Sen*, 76.

77 Hamilton, *Amartya Sen*, 76.

78 Robeyns, “The Capability Approach,” 107.

be identified by reducing them to individuals and their properties. Hence, ontological individualism entails claims about the nature of human beings, the way they live their lives, and their relationship to society. In this view, society is built up of individuals only and hence is nothing more than the sum of individuals and their properties.<sup>79</sup> Sen embraces ethical individualism but does not rely on ontological individualism. However, the person takes precedence over the social structures. Sen's concern is about what happens to a person.

On the other hand, in the Catholic social tradition, Sociality is an integral and indispensable dimension of human personality, as *Gaudium et Spes*. Put it: "But God did not create man as a solitary, for from the beginning "male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). Their companionship produces the primary form of interpersonal communion. For by his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others, he can neither live nor develop his potential."<sup>80</sup> From this, it could be inferred that sociality is an integral part of an individual.

### The integration of the 'transcendental-institutional' approach and the 'realization-focused' approach

The Catholic social tradition does not separate the 'transcendental-institutional' approach and the 'realization-focused' approaches and sees, unlike Sen, a close relationship between the transformation of institutions and the transformation of individuals within those institutions. "For [i]f the laws are to bring about significant, long-lasting effects, the majority of the members of society must be adequately motivated to accept them and personally transformed to respond. Only by cultivating sound virtues will people be able to make a selfless ecological commitment."<sup>81</sup> Today, we realize more and more that the economic and political institutions continue to operate in environmentally and socially harmful ways. The people who sustain or support them have not changed their attitudes from lords and masters to caretakers of nature. This is why *Laudato Si'* concludes that what is needed are "profound changes in lifestyles, models of production and

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79 Robeyns, "The Capability Approach," 108.

80 Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, #12.

81 Francis, Pope, *Laudato si*, #211.

consumption, and profound changes in ‘the established structures of power which today govern societies.’<sup>82</sup>

## Conclusion

It has been argued that understanding democracy as public reasoning and government by discussion is an essential contribution of Amartya Sen to the democratic theory. However, this understanding of democracy remains incomplete and inadequate, as argued above. Therefore, in the presence of deep divisions and disagreement when people conduct public deliberations, the reach of the reason is questionable in achieving a total agreement. On the other hand, it has been attempted to establish participation as integral to being a human person from the perspective of Catholic Social Teaching. The principle of participation provides, deepens, and enriches the understanding of democracy. However, this does not negate the importance of public reasoning arguments, dialogues, and deliberations. Democracy as public reasoning remains in the shackles of liberal, rational tradition. In this regard, Catholic Social Teaching’s principle of participation has much to contribute in terms of social friendships and political love.

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82 Francis, Pope, *Laudato si*, #5.

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# Crisis of Democracy from the Perspective of Christian Ethics

*Wilhelm Guggenberger*

## **Abstract**

Democracy is a social process that must always be won anew in practice. This means that the very existence of democracy is always at risk. At present, there are a number of challenges for democratic states. This article particularly references globalization, populism, the phenomena of post-democracy, and global problems that hardly seem to be solved by democratic means. The guidelines of Catholic Social Teaching offer starting points for overcoming such crises. In particular, the principle of the common good will be emphasized. This should not be seen as the formulation of a comprehensive goal for the whole of society that has already been defined but rather as an attitude in which individuals perceive and encounter each other. Such an attitude forms the basis of democratic structures beyond all constitutional and legal structures.

**Keywords:** *Democracy, Christian social ethics, globalization*

Recently one can hear numerous rumours about a crisis of democracy. However, there may have been a crisis in modern democracy from the outset, which shows that democratic practice must always be won anew. Democracy is not a static state guaranteed by juridical norms but a dynamic process that depends on the will and intention of the citizens. History is not a linear process as well. Thus, it is misleading to assume that the western Enlightenment represents a status of human maturity that can no longer be lost. The historic events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century impressively disprove this thesis as it does the western ignorance according to human rights in the long history of the disaster of colonialism. The ongoing precarious situation of democracy is documented in the Economist's Democracy Index, among others. The countries most clearly represented in this book are India, Nigeria, and Austria. According to this index, Nigeria has made great strides in the past ten years in democratic development, rising from one of the bottom ranks of so-called hybrid regimes to a flawed democracy. On the other hand, India significantly fell behind in the category of flawed democracies and Austria within

the category of full democracies. It is worth mentioning that the US is no longer considered a full democracy in the 2020 report.<sup>1</sup>

Although the political development of societies fluctuates heavily, the US scholar Francis Fukuyama presented a concept of an end of history in 1992 in the wake of the collapse of the former Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact.<sup>2</sup> The end of history in this context did not mean doomsday, but a situation in which no longer different ideologies had been competing with each other and no conflict between different models of social order existed. Republican democracy, in combination with a liberal market economy, was considered to be the universal model of social fabric from that time on. This would have made the American way of life the comprehensive lifestyle of humanity. Such a thesis may have been convincing within a short moment of global development. Many of us may then have seen a window of opportunity to overcome geopolitical threats in the international field and get rid of tyranny in most nation-states. From today's point of view, it is not surprising that this assumption has not been confirmed in the longer term. Large parts of human history were characterized by authoritarian regimes hostile to freedom. These did not need a Communist-Stalinist ideology to exist.

Moreover, this particular ideology was not the only one able to challenge liberal democratic convictions and imagery. The repression of opposition and freedom of expression in Russia by Vladimir Putin's regime and his brutal invasion of Ukraine in March 2022 sadly confirm this. So, we are not spared from identifying a number of different threats to democracy at the present time.

## Challenges to Liberal Democracy

I do not want to repeat the jeopardizing occurrences that have taken place since the 1990s making the term terror in its different facets a refrain in news headlines and politician's addresses. It seems more interesting to look at the most recent but sometimes unspectacular developments, which nevertheless evoke the impression

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1 The Economist Intelligence Unit, *Democracy Index 2010*; The Economist Intelligence Unit, *Democracy Index 2020*.

2 Fukuyama, *The End of History*.

that democracy is endangered more seriously than ever before and, for the most part, not by foreign powers but from within society.

## Globalization

Without wanting to discuss the multi-layered meaning of globalization in more detail here, one can state that globalization processes reduce the importance of nation-state politics. This also raises questions about who can decide democratically on important developments and how. As climate change and the loss of biodiversity are the most urgent problems to be solved today, as the global economy functions more or less unimpressed by national rules, as a pandemic uncontrollably circles the globe in ever new waves, democratic decisions on the ground hardly seem to matter anymore. Local communities can handle none of the mentioned challenges while we do not have the institutions of an international or even global democracy at all. Thus, without a global government, global governance requires new forms of political control of power and constructive cooperation that develop and exceed the currently available democratic structures.

Beyond this general problem of the functioning of democracy in contexts of huge scale, we have to recognize that particular aspects of globalization exacerbate the question of who is the *demos* of democracy. Who is the collective decision-making subject, and who belongs to the group of decision-makers in reality?<sup>3</sup> According to John Rawls, those offices and positions in a society that decide on the distribution of basic goods and the permissibility of inequalities in this distribution must be open to all according to fair equality of opportunity. In addition to general educational opportunities, such a rule presupposes democratic structures of co-determination that involve as many people as possible who are affected by decisions.

A. Pelinka calls mega-trend when he states that the last two centuries have been characterized by a permanently increasing congruence between those involved in legitimizing political power and those subject to that power.<sup>4</sup> Even if

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<sup>3</sup> See Pelinka, *Demokratie im Zeitalter der Globalisierung*.

<sup>4</sup> Pelinka, *Demokratie im Zeitalter der Globalisierung*, 90: „Die letzten zwei Jahrhunderte waren durch die permanente Ausweitung des ‚Demos‘ in Richtung auf eine Deckungsgleichheit zwischen den an der Legitimierung politischer Macht Beteiligten und den dieser Macht Unterworfenen geprägt.“

the circumstances will never be such that everyone without exception may have a real say, for example, in the right to vote, this inclusion works quite well within many states. While democratic participation was the privilege of the elite in the Greek polis, it has now become the right of the people in a majority of societies. However, since democracy was developed and functions within nation-states, participation remains tied to citizenship. This poses challenges in times of increasing migration movements. Should not participation in society's social and economic life be a more important prerequisite for the possibility of participation in political life than the fact that someone was born in a certain territory or that of one's parents' citizenship? Such questions have to be discussed in light of the fact that a growing number of migrants often live for a long time in states where they have little or no civil rights. However, the softening of the so-called *jus sanguinis* according to citizenship will be met with resistance, above all from those who perceive themselves as the economic losers of globalization and now fear additional competition from foreign invaders in the field of politics. In different ways, both groups – legally non-citizens and particularly economic left behind citizens – are or at least feel excluded from decision-making. Thus, democracy loses prestige while the institutions of the state lose authority and credibility. This brings us to the second development that threatens democracy.

## Populism

Populist movements have gained ground in many countries over the past years. These movements differ in detail very much, some belong to the right political, others to the left. Thus, it is not an easy task to define the whole phenomenon sufficiently. However, a convincing characteristic of populisms seems to be its fundamentally anti-pluralist impetus.<sup>5</sup> Striving for popularity is an unavoidable part of democracy. The problem with populism, however, is that leaders or parties claim to exclusively represent the people and their concerns. They exclude those who disagree with “the people” or even declare them enemies. Populism usually makes a sharp distinction between we and them and thus fuels exclusion and hostility. That makes democratic discourse, and a cultivated struggle for the best

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5 Cf. Müller, *Was ist Populismus?* 129.



ideas impossible since the other is no longer accepted as an opponent but made a foe to be defeated.

Surveys in different European countries have shown that the “strong support for democratic principles across Europe contrasts with widespread democratic dissatisfaction among European citizens”<sup>6</sup>. For the most part, the reason lies in voters’ perception of not being adequately represented in the political process. They do not see their concerns well represented by officeholders and established parties. This is how protesters without programmatic ideas can win elections. When they do come to power, their inability to govern quickly becomes apparent, which further weakens trust in the political system. The distrust of established parties and politicians may have different reasons. Sometimes there are institutional failures, corruption, and nepotism, but the not always justified self-perception of citizens as losers in the dynamics of globalization is also important. Therefore, the populist propaganda is successful when it “puts the emphasis on the fundamental role of ‘the people’ in politics, claims that ‘the people’ have been betrayed by ‘the elites’ in charge who are abusing their position of power, and demands that the sovereignty of the people be restored”<sup>7</sup>.

Global challenges require the development of global solidarity. However, as nation-state agents still carry out politics, efficient and transformative decision-making presupposes functioning national policies. According to Fukuyama, the weaker national identity and domestic cohesion are the worse these policies function. If there is insufficient trust in the respective political system and the cohesion of different groupings in a state, a decent identity of the nation, which must not be confused with chauvinist nationalism, will not develop.<sup>8</sup> In this context, dividing populism is a negative factor that undermines the functioning of democracies, especially when they are not yet stable or have been weakened by economic or other kinds of crises.

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6 Kriesi, *Is there a Crisis of Democracy in Europe*, 245-246.

7 Kriesi, *Is there a Crisis of Democracy in Europe*, 248.

8 See Fukuyama, *Identity*, 124-139.

## Post-democracy

The term post-democracy was made famous by the British scholar of politics and sociology Colin Crouch. This author describes post-democracy as a situation that occurs “when powerful minority interests have become far more active than the mass of ordinary people in making the political system work for them; where political elites have learned to manage and manipulate popular demands; where people have to be pursued to vote by top-down publicity campaigns.”<sup>9</sup> The more citizens lack fundamental capabilities such as basic education, availability of quality information, ability to use democratic instruments, and access to the legal system, the easier it is for economic elites to manipulate the media and all public communication and to instrumentalize and abuse the political system for their interests. Formal democratic structures may then be in place and constitutionally secured, elections may take place, and parliaments may meet, but a real rule by the people for the people has nevertheless disappeared.

Neoliberal ideology promotes such situations by transferring the logic of the market and unbridled competition into the political field. It is sometimes claimed that the economic market is the better form of democracy, as consumers can express their will through every act of purchase and thus help shape reality, whereas in the political context, a vote, at best, could be held every few years on representatives whose concrete actions would then often remain uncontrolled by their voters. Of course, the principle of ‘one person, one vote’ is completely undermined by what is overlooked or concealed by such an argument. In the market, the greater a ‘voter’s’ wealth, the more votes he has. Every banknote becomes a ballot paper, and the dispossessed lose their right to vote. This, of course, should not be a real problem for a neoliberal position. “Consider: as a class and other impediments to servicing the entrepreneurial self are radically depoliticized, what the neoliberals call ‘the equal right to inequality’ is newly legitimated, thereby tabling democracy’s formal commitment to egalitarianism.”<sup>10</sup>

This understanding of society is already highly problematic in itself, but there are also forces promoting post-democracy for motives that are anything but lib-

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9 Crouch, *Post-Democracy*, 19-20.

10 Brown, *American Nightmare*, 695.

eral.<sup>11</sup> Some originate from a morally inspired neo-conservatism that wants to ward off the dangers of ethical indifferentism and is inspired by fundamentalist religious movements. Others are motivated more by a particular kind of statism that does not need to have religious roots but believes it has to save the nation or even a certain culture or way of life from the threat of foreign forces. Richard Rorty observed a development towards post-democracy, which the series of terrorist attacks had triggered shortly after the turn of the millennium in the USA and Europe. In this process, power passed from the people mainly to the military and secret services. The argument for a kind of “secret policy” without public discourse was, in this case, the preservation of public security. “At the end of this process of erosion, democracy would have been replaced by something quite different. This would probably be neither military dictatorship nor Orwellian totalitarianism but rather a relatively benevolent despotism, imposed by what would gradually become a hereditary nomenklatura.”<sup>12</sup>

## Pressing Global Issues

Another threat to democracy, which is quite similar to the latter, although it usually comes from other political camps, can be expressed by the phrase: In a crisis, it is the hour of the executive. What is meant by this is that pressing problems require spirited and rapid action without much space being given to opinion-forming and discussion.

Sociologist Hartmut Rosa states that democracy as a decision-making structure seems somewhat inert in the face of complex contemporary developments. It is precisely social complexity that makes it necessary to make political decision-making processes very transparent and interactive. “In this way, political decisions by the government need to be constantly linked back to public opinion as a basis for legitimacy.”<sup>13</sup> This process needs more time as the plurality in a

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11 Brown, *American Nightmare*, 705-711.

12 Rorty, *Post-Democracy*.

13 Reckwitz and Rosa, *Spätmoderne in der Krise*, 208-209: „Politische Entscheidungen der Regierung bedürfen auf diese Weise der stetigen Rückbindung an die öffentliche Meinung als Legitimationsgrundlage.“ (Translation by WG)

society increases. Therefore, a huge number of positions and interests requires more democracy to gain generally accepted decisions and makes democracy more cumbersome and slower. In the face of pressing problems, the public use of reason thus comes under increasing pressure because it is considered inefficient. Democratic politics is denigrated as a brake on necessary processes of change and transformation and runs behind the development instead of proactively shaping it.

An interesting observation in the context of the two currently prevailing crises - advancing global warming and the COVID 19 pandemic - is that a renaissance of social obligations is taking place, counteracting the general trend towards individualization.<sup>14</sup> Movements like *Fridays for Future* remind us that individual interests and desires must be put aside to preserve future generations' right to a dignified life. The health strategy of many states in the pandemic is to demand vaccination against the virus as a duty to the general public. For the first time in a long time, this has massively challenged the liberal paradigm, which assumes that it is for the good of all if everyone pursues their interests as purposefully as possible. This turn towards an awareness that the general safeguarding of rights is only guaranteed if as many agents as possible also fulfil duties towards others is to be welcomed in principle from an ethical perspective.

Nevertheless, it remains ambivalent if it comes to ruling a particular kind of elite. This elite may consist of scientists or ethicists, or self-proclaimed saviors. Even if they are factually right, a forced way of solving problems contradicts the principle of respect for each person and their dignity.

The population must be convinced of political measures as much as possible, even if it is difficult in a crisis. Without broad support, there will soon be protests and divisions. Reasonable ecological measures will then be rejected as eco-dictatorship, and medical requirements in the pandemic will be considered an arbitrary deprivation of liberty, as we are currently experiencing. Again, people who already feel marginalized or left behind will react particularly intensely by beginning to reject the political system and withdrawing from the democratic process altogether or, indeed, becoming supporters of populist seducers.

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<sup>14</sup> See Reckwitz, *Die Pflicht ruft*, 6.

## Impulses of Christian Ethics

All the mentioned threats indicate that constitutional norms and legal structures alone cannot ensure the sustainable functioning of democracies; they are too formal, too soft, and too easily perverted. Democracy requires ethical foundations; it presupposes particular habits on the part of the people who are practicing it.

Where strong emotional ties like solidarity and a sense of the common good are lacking, tendencies of fragmentation arise, as Charles Taylor mentioned already in the early 1990s.<sup>15</sup> Typical in such situations is a politics of special interests, vehemently pursued by individuals and small groups, which is no longer practiced in democratic decision-making processes but in court. Fragmented societies may protect individual rights and the justified interests of minorities well, but their weakness is “a people increasingly less capable of forming a common purpose and carrying it out. Fragmentation arises when people see themselves more and more atomistically, otherwise put, as less and less bound to their fellow citizens in common projects and allegiances.”<sup>16</sup>

According to Fukuyama, the focus on litigation in court is a particular element of the democratic tradition of the United States of America, which from the outset has been characterized by distrust of the state. The fact that “courts and legislature have usurped many of the proper functions of the executive, making the operation of the government as a whole both incoherent and inefficient”<sup>17</sup> accompanied by an increasing influence of interest groups on politics have made the US a state of “courts and parties”. That means a rule of separated pressure groups that rely on civil law to regulate their relations with each other. Even if such structures may be more deeply rooted in the US than, for example, in the political tradition of Europe, it can be observed that they are becoming increasingly common in many societies around the world. Major texts of the Catholic Social Doctrine fundamentally question such a state of affairs with reference to a biblically-based image of humanity.

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15 Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, 109-121.

16 Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, 112-113.

17 Fukuyama, *Political Order and Political Decay*, 470.

In 1931 Pope Pius XI already pointed out the limited capacity of the law by stating: “How completely deceived, therefore, are those rash reformers who concern themselves with the enforcement of justice alone - and this, commutative justice - and in their pride reject the assistance of charity! Admittedly, no vicarious charity can substitute for justice which is due as an obligation and is wrongfully denied. Yet even supposing that everyone should finally receive all that is due him, the widest field for charity will always remain open. For justice alone can, if faithfully observed, remove the causes of social conflict but can never bring about the union of minds and hearts.”<sup>18</sup> Since such union of minds and hearts is the precondition of lasting peace and stability in cooperation, as the Pope mentions further, civil right - as important as its functioning maybe - is not sufficient as the basis of a community. This needs people who consider themselves to be members of a great family they want to maintain for its own sake, not just because it might be of use to them.

We can recognize the actual reason for this weakness of an exclusively legally regulated and regulable society when we become aware of the essence of the common good. The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (No. 167) says: The common good must be served in its fullness, not according to reductionist visions that certain people subordinate to their advantages; ... The common good corresponds to the highest of human instincts, but it is a good that is very difficult to attain because it requires the constant ability and effort to seek the good of others as though it were one’s good.”<sup>19</sup> The legitimate pursuit of one’s interests must always consider the effects of one’s decisions and actions on the community as a whole. Only in this way can the common good be realized. This is not identical to a concept in which individually pursued interests and goals limit each other according to the logic of checks and balances. In such a system, society is merely understood as a vehicle for fulfilling one’s desires. Fellow human beings remain a means to an end. This is better than the brutal cut-throat competition in which cooperation is fundamentally excluded. Nevertheless, approaches of enlightened

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18 Pius XI, *Quadragesimo anno*, no. 137.

19 Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, § 167.

egoism are not suitable for creating a sustainable, humane social order in favor of all that manages without excessive exploitation of our ecological environment.

In the words of Pope Francis, that means: “Individualism does not make us more free, more equal, more fraternal. The mere sum of individual interests cannot generate a better world for the whole human family. Nor can it save us from the many ills that are now increasingly globalized. Radical individualism is a virus that is extremely difficult to eliminate, for it is clever. It makes us believe that everything consists in giving free reign to our ambitions as if by pursuing ever greater ambitions and creating safety nets, we would somehow be serving the common good.”<sup>20</sup>

An individualistic understanding of democracy can be found in different forms of identity politics. Fukuyama mentioned in 2018 that “in many democracies, the left focuses less on creating broad economic equality and more on promoting the interests of a wide variety of marginalized groups, such as ethnic minorities, immigrants and refugees, women, and LGBT people. The right, meanwhile, has redefined its core mission as the patriotic protection of traditional national identity, which is often explicitly connected to race, ethnicity, or religion.”<sup>21</sup> The commitment to the disadvantaged groups mentioned is often ethically motivated and undoubtedly necessary. Likewise, as already noted, a certain form of national pride, for instance, in the sense of constitutional patriotism, is quite helpful in generating social responsibility. However, if identity politics leads to a new kind of tribalism, it becomes destructive in the long run and prevents the efficient solution of overarching problems. Speaking of the common good here, we do not so primarily mean a goal for a society that has already been defined in terms of content but rather an attitude in which individuals perceive and encounter each other. Through this attitude, the processes of problem-solving and shaping society are themselves transformed.

In his texts, Pope Francis repeatedly speaks of a society that has to be shaped according to the polyhedron model. He distinguishes this model from the sphere in which everything is homogenized and has no corners and edges. The Pope calls for being committed “to living and teaching the value of respect for others, a love

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20 Francis, Pope, *Fratelli tutti. On Fraternity and Social Friendship*, no. 105.

21 Fukuyama, *Against Identity Politics*.

capable of welcoming differences, and the priority of the dignity of every human being over his or her ideas, opinions, practices, and even sins. Even as forms of fanaticism, closedmindedness, and social and cultural fragmentation proliferate in present-day society, a good politician will take the first step and insist that different voices be heard. Disagreements may well give rise to conflicts, but uniformity proves stifling and leads to cultural decay.”<sup>22</sup> However, it seems necessary to recognize that the idea of polyhedron first was introduced in *Evangelii Gaudium* in a chapter headlined “The whole is greater than the part.”<sup>23</sup> The plurality which respects and upholds the dignity and worth of individuals and particular groups is at the same time one which respects the welfare of the whole community. Appreciation of the person and their freedom on the one hand and concern for the greater common good on the other complement each other in the sense of a Christian ethic. The relation of both must not be misunderstood in the sense of a trade-off; both elements are rather a condition of possibility to each other.

The interconnectedness of individual welfare and the common good and the indissoluble link between eternal salvation of the soul and earthly well-being are why the proclamation of the Gospel always has a political dimension. Christian ethic can thus bypass neither politics nor economics but has to offer impulses to shape both in a life-fostering manner. Therefore, the Pope reminds us:

“Recognizing that all people are our brothers and sisters, and seeking forms of social friendship that include everyone, is not merely utopian. It demands a decisive commitment to devising effective means to this end. Any effort along these lines becomes a noble exercise of charity. Whereas individuals can help others in need, when they join together in initiating social processes of fraternity and justice for all, they enter the ‘field of charity at its most vast, namely political charity’. This entails working for a social and political order whose soul is social charity. Once more, I appeal for a renewed appreciation of politics as ‘a lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity, inasmuch as it seeks the common good’.”<sup>24</sup>

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22 Francis, Pope, *Fratelli tutti*, no. 191.

23 Cf. Francis, Pope, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 234-237.

24 Francis, Pope, *Fratelli tutti*, no. 180.



In a pluralistic society, helping to shape politics in a Christian way must not mean imposing one's convictions on others, neither religious nor ethical. By that, religion would undermine democracy that thrives on freedom of religion, freedom of expression, and a plurality of positions. Rather, it is about creating a climate in which the best solutions for all can be sought together.<sup>25</sup> If we take this seriously, we must also accept that sometimes political solutions are found with which we, as believers, do not fully agree. The willingness to relativize one's claims and convictions is a part of a democratic society as the justified expectation that minorities and their concerns will be protected as the common good allows.

The belief in one God of all creation, whose children are all humans, may contribute to the establishment of such a society just as much as the knowledge that no human being is flawless. Democracy requires tolerance and understanding of one's weaknesses and the weaknesses of others. Democracy also requires a commitment to each other and responsibility for one's actions. This concerns politicians as well as the people. Politicians should not perceive their offices only as an opportunity for career and enrichment but should see them as a service to the community. Citizens should see politics as a way to advance their interests and as a tool to enhance the common good and avoid the loss or sacrifice of a single one. If the development goes in this direction, democracy will become stronger even if it is threatened in many ways. Contributing to this is one of the tasks of Christian social responsibility. Though no political system will ever realize the kingdom of God on earth, political conditions characterized by mutual goodwill, by sister- and brotherhood may help prepare the way for this kingdom in people's hearts. The contribution of Christian ethics to politics is to be understood in this spirit.

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25 Cf. Francis, Pope, *Laudato si'*. No.188.

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# From Conquest to Cohabitation: Reviewing the Joshuarian Approach towards Ethno-Religious Pluralism

*Stephen Oluwakayode Eyeowa*

## **Abstract**

The French revolution was a critical gamechanger in world politics and could be rightly considered the origin of modern western democracy. But while pluralism is intrinsic to democracy, its management seems a herculean task, as “majority absolutism” often hijacks the process. The shift towards identity politics is a reaction to this under-mismanaged pluralism such that questions like “who are we” and “how do we fit in” become an integral part among stakeholders. Hence, how should the cling to ethnic or religious affiliation confront pluralism within the polity without resorting to violence? This paper responds, positing the book of Joshua as a credible embraceable exemplar.

**Keywords:** *Religion, Violence, Polity, Pluralism, Book of Joshua, and Biblical Hermeneutics.*

## Introduction

The French revolution comes across as a significant gamechanger in world politics. Rephrasing François Furet, the revolution confiscated traditional absolutist monarchic/theocratic authorities and introduced democracy.<sup>1</sup> The reality of pluralism is undetachable from the democratic process. In other words, the mutuality between democracy and pluralism is evident. On the one hand, pluralism is the social condition and promise of democracy. On the other hand, democracy is the condition for the workability of pluralism, its management and flourishing.<sup>2</sup> The

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1 Cf. R.R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution*, Vol. I, (N.J: Princeton, 1959-64), 13-20; Francois Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. Elborg Forster (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981), 204; James Miller, “Modern Democracy From France to America.” *Salmagundi* 84, (1989), 178; Christopher Hobson, “Revolution, Representation and the Foundations of Modern Democracy.” *European Journal of Political Theory* 7, no.4, (2008), 449.

2 Berger, *Altars of Modernity*, 1, defines pluralism as “a social situation in which people with different ethnicities, worldviews, and moralities live together peacefully and interact with each other amicably.”

right to be different and the freedom to openly express this difference is intrinsic to democracy. However, the fair management of pluralism in modern democracy seems a herculean task, as “majority absolutism”<sup>3</sup> often dictates the process. The trending drift towards *identity politics*<sup>4</sup> is a reaction to this under/mismanaged pluralism such that increasingly solace seems obtainable in supposedly trounced cultural and religious institutions. Hence, to what extent can religion, in particular, guarantee or preserve the integrity of a pluralistic polity without resorting to violence? This paper responds from the angle of biblical hermeneutics, exposing a holistic view of the Joshuarian approach. That is, the paper (i) exposes Joshua’s confrontation with the challenge of pluralism, (ii) argues that Joshua’s approach(es) to dealing with pluralism could be distilled into a method, from which (iii) modern societies can learn by extracting some takeaways.

## Un-Holy Religious Tension: The Case of the Hebrew Bible<sup>5</sup>

Religious texts still play a foundational role in our modern social imagination. Their “claimed” divinely-inspired contents incite worship and reverence. They

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3 Burke, *Revolution in France*, 109-110, considers the French revolution as a process, where the majority exercises tyranny through popular persecution. He notes: “...Aristotle observes that a democracy has many striking points of resemblance with a tyranny, [...] that in a democracy the majority of citizens is capable of exercising the most cruel oppressions upon the minority whenever strong divisions prevail in that kind of polity.”

4 Although the term “identity politics” has come to mean different things for different people (cf. Bernstein, *Identity Politics*, 47-48), basic to its understanding is the establishment of exclusive political groups, agenda and activities based on identities (gender, ideology, linguistics, race, religion, and sexual orientation), aiming to secure political freedom within the traditional broad-based political context. In other words, “identity politics” underscores the uprise of an exclusive political group, seeking political freedom from the larger political context on the basis of identity distinctiveness and marginalization. Huntington, *Clash of Civilization*, 125-130, argues that contemporary political boundaries are mostly based on cultural sentiment (ethnic or religious), as alignments defined by ideology and superpower relations gradually give way. He demonstrates that in countries with sizable groups of people from different backgrounds, culture seems determinant for fusion or separation. Resultantly, a consequence of embracing identity politics is the uprise of separatist movements, Brexit being the latest. This paper understands identity politics within its ethnic and religious expressions.

5 This paper adopts the term “Hebrew Bible” to imply what is popularly referred to, especially in the Christian tradition as Old Testament. The lexical choice of “Hebrew Bible” over Old Testament seeks to uphold the former as a neutral alternative. The use of Old Testament often implies

shape traditions, cultures, ideologies, and praxis. However, their relevance in moral, socio-political, and religious discourses has been intensely contested in recent years.<sup>6</sup> The reason is simple: the perception that religious beliefs are absolute and immutable has caused severe damage when such thoughts encounter other cultural or religious traditions. The debate regarding the propagation of violence by the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), for instance, identifies the dogmatic embrace of their respective canons as igniters of violent conflicts. Sadly, words with positive connotations such as *Hērem*,<sup>7</sup> *Deus Vult*, and *Allahu Akbar* are expressions that are sometimes mobilized to propagate violent conquest, crusade, and *jihad*. At the heart of most religiously motivated disputes is the malmanagement of diversity or pluralism.

The Hebrew Bible contains narratives punctuated with violent moments. Whether these narratives are simply textual fictions or historical facts, the use and justification of violence in its various forms are entrenched in the Hebrew Bi-

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that there is a New Testament, inferring the outdatedness, replacement, or incompleteness of the former. The referential terms “Old” and “New” institute a comparative order, which in most cases lead to the prioritization of the latter over the former. In other words, the language of “Old” and “New” subtly engender the temptation to think that the Christian divine revelatory message is superior to the Jewish experience of divine revelation. Such an unspoken presupposition or prejudice influences the reception and appreciation of the so-called Old Testament. The paper prefers the term “Hebrew Bible” to stress canonical neutrality and that each religious canon is authentic in its right. For more details, cf. C.R. Seitz, “Old Testament or Hebrew Bible?: Some Theological Considerations.” *Pro Ecclesia* 5, no.3 (1996): 292-303; Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997); James A. Loader, “Tenach and Old Testament – the same Bible?.” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 58, no.4, (2009): 1415-1430; Robin Routledge, *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach*. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009); Amy-Jill Levine, “What is the Difference between the Old Testament, the Tanakh, and the Hebrew Bible?”, Available at: <https://www.bibleodyssey.org:443/en/tools/bible-basics/what-is-the-difference-between-the-old-testament-the-tanakh-and-the-hebrew-bible> accessed 03.12.2021.

6 Cf. W. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997); N. Lohfink, “Gewalt und Monotheismus – Beispiel Altes Testament.” *Monotheismus – eine Quelle der Gewalt?*, edited by Hermann Düringer. Frankfurt: HAAG + Herchen Verlag (2004), 60-78; E. Seibert, *The Violence of Scripture: Overcoming the Old Testament’s Troubling Legacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012); Mark G. Brett, *Political Trauma and Healing: Biblical Ethics for a Postcolonial World*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

7 Although the Hebrew *Hērem* in its general usage indicates the setting apart of objects or subjects (humans) to God for complete destruction, there are instances in the Hebrew bible where *Hērem* simply refers to setting apart of objects or subjects to God for the benefits of the Priests (cf. Lev 27,21; Num 18,14; Ezek 44,29).

ble.<sup>8</sup> Such disconcerting accounts question the relevance of the Hebrew Bible and impose a hermeneutic burden on readers. In effect, the *Rezeption/Wirkungsgeschichte* of violent texts in the Hebrew Bible has triggered unimaginable trauma rather than its expected salvific hope.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, YHWH is an accomplice.<sup>10</sup> According to Seibert, the Old Testament God instantly annihilates individuals, massacres many people, and commands genocide.<sup>11</sup> Dawkin's atheist claim simply seeks to disrobe YHWH of his intrinsic goodness. He perceives YHWH as the most unpleasant character in all fiction: a vindictive and bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser.<sup>12</sup> Brueggemann softens the tone by simply affirming violence as a divine possibility and that it is only reasonable to admit that divine violence belongs to the very fabric of faith.<sup>13</sup> But Schwager certainly exaggerates when he affirms that there is no other topic as frequently mentioned in the Hebrew Bible as God's bloody works.<sup>14</sup>

Consequently, there is a dual evaluation determining the functional relevance of the Hebrew Bible in the contemporary polity. On the one hand, there is an eval-

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8 Several verbs within the Hebrew canon are used to incite and propagate violence. They include *akal* (consume, devour – Deut 4,24; 9,3), *hāram* (total annihilation – Exod 22,19; Deut 7,2; Jos 6,17), *kalah* (destroy – Exod 33,5; Jos 8,24), *nakah* (kill, smite – Gen 8,21; Exod 3,20; Num 21,35), and *shamad* (exterminate, demolish – Deut 6,15; Jos 23,15), to mention but these few. Highly debatable in biblical scholarship, however, is the understanding of the Hebrew noun *ḥērem*. For more explicit details, see, N. Lohfink, “Ḥāram.” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (eds.), (MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 197; G. Baumann, “Gott als Kriegsherr gegen andere Völker.” *Gottesbilder der Gewalt im Alten Testament verstehen*. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006): 84-99; Mark R. Glanville, “חָרָם (*ḥērem*) as Israelite Identity Formation: Canaanite Destruction and the Stranger (גֵר, *gēr*).” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 83, no. 4 (2021): 547-570.

9 Prominent, in this regard, is Marcion of Sinope. He rejects the Hebrew canon based on the claims that the teachings and life of Christ are incompatible to the action of the Hebrew God, whom he brandishes as brutal and violent. He claims that the God of the Old Testament has an unjust, anger, contentious and unmerciful personality (cf. Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 269).

10 The involvement of YHWH as a culprit in such interrogation makes the discussion more complicated. Lohfink, *Gewalt und Monotheismus* 71-77, outlines biblical texts that portrait violence. They include narratives on land grabbing of Israel, divine war, YHWH as a warrior, imprecatory psalms, legitimate violence, the offering of animals, victims, and cult. Similarly, Seibert, *Violence of Scripture*, 5, underscores that the Bible sometimes promotes objectionable values, encourages unethical behaviours, and portrays God in unacceptable ways.

11 Seibert, *Violence of Scripture*, 23-24.

12 Dawkins, *God Delusion*, 51.

13 Brueggemann, *Theology*, 381.

14 Schwager, *Scapagoats*, 55.



uation based on its literary character. On the other hand, the radical clamour for religion-state separation in modern politics seeks to establish the reign of secular principles and an ethos devoid of religious colouration.<sup>15</sup> Yet, the role of religion in the polity remains incontestable.

## Case Study: Mis-Perceptions about the Book of Joshua

One of the most debated issues in biblical scholarship, international relations, conflict management, and peace studies concerns the intercultural competence of the book of Joshua. The widespread perception of the book as a genocidal account or Book of Conquest seems to be a hermeneutical nightmare that has attracted significant scholarly attention.<sup>16</sup> The emphasis on *Landnahme* without equal attention to the *Landgabe* promise further intensifies the hermeneutical ambiguities.<sup>17</sup> In the modern democratic dispensation, occasionally ruined by radical nationalist/secessionist movements, ethnic bigotry, and religious extremism, the book of Joshua seems to be rapidly losing its relevance. The so-called Canaanite Massacre comes across as Israel's thought-out implementation of an ethnic, nationalist, expansionist, or supremacist agenda. The militaristic setting and expressions in the book, Israel's adoption of the *Hērem* clause in shaping her identity, and the depiction of YHWH as a warlord<sup>18</sup> who commands the elimination of the rival nations

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15 Audi, *Political Participation*, 396, insists on the seclusion of religion from the political space, especially in the decision-making process or legal coercion of a pluralistic society. He opines that political choices which are based on religious convictions tend to be more exclusivist, intolerant and radically self-imposing. Similarly, Smolin, *Regulating Religious*, 1076-1077, opposes appropriating tenants of a so-called good religion as the standard for admission to the political and legal debate.

16 Brett, *Political Trauma and Healing*, 86–88; Brueggemann, *God of Joshua*, 171 and 173; Collins, *Violence*, 9; Cowles, *Show Them no Mercy*, 11-44; Hawk, *Book of Conquest*, 121–132; Hawk, *Truth about Conquest*, 135; Hoffman, *Deuteronomistic Concept of the Herem*, 196; Morrison, *Did God Command Genocide*, 7-26; Rauser, *Commanded Genocide*, 27-41; Zehnder, *The Annihilation of the Canaanites*, 263-290.

17 In other words, the attribution of Israel's settlement in the promised land as an outright consequence of a successful conquest demeans YHWH's role in the process. It undermines the covenantal promises, where YHWH severally swore to give the land to Israel as an everlasting gift.

18 The portrayal of YHWH as a warlord spreads throughout the Hebrew Bible. In the Torah, "YHWH is a man of war, and YHWH is his name (Exod 15,3)." The Song of Moses also presents gory

provoke resentment among contemporary readers, gaining more sympathy for the nations at the detriment of YHWH's merciful nature.

Like several Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) literary and archaeological sources, the book of Joshua is one of the several biblical texts that exhibit strong interlace between religion and politics. In effect, the book of Joshua seems to suggest politics as an essential aspect of the divine life. The Hebrew deity (YHWH) is an accomplice, as he deeply engages in Israel's polity. YHWH appears *as the brain* behind Israel's foundational history and seemingly nationalist agenda, under the creed of "one God, one law, one people."<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, just as political theoreticians express scepticism about the world's fast-emerging nationalist tendencies, the "one God, one law, one people" agenda also encounters strong resistance.<sup>20</sup>

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images of YHWH (Deut 32, 22-25.40-42). In the prophetic literature, Isaiah describes YHWH as "a mighty man and like a man of war(s) who stirs up his fury" (Isa 42,13). Zephaniah takes solace in the image of YHWH as "a warrior who gives victory" (Zeph 3,17). Within the wisdom writings, the psalmist exults YHWH as strong and mighty in battle (Psa 24,8). Furthermore, the violent image of YHWH as a warlord or warrior is buttressed in the Hebrew expression – יהוה נלחם ליהם גלחם (for YHWH fights for you). This motif appears five times in the Torah (Exod 14,14.25; Deut 1,30; 3,22; 20,4). Its initial usage context links such divine act to the quest of obtaining justice for the oppressed so that either for or against Israel (Isa 63,10; Jer 21,5-6), waging war seems an integral activity of YHWH, which simultaneously seeks punitive and curative ends. Fischer's observation appears indeed apt, spotting divine violence as God's determination to end human violence. Using Exod 1-15 as case study, he notes: "one aspect [in Exod. 1–15] remains a cause for astonishment: in the long period of suffering the Israelites never use violence themselves. It is left to God to counter [the Pharaoh's] oppression" (cf. Fischer, *Who is Violent*, 108).

19 The inspiration behind such coinage is attributable to the first-century Romano-Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (*Ant* 4.201), who used the expression θεός γὰρ εἷς και τὸ Ἑβραίων γένος ἓν, in articulating the idea of "one God and one Jewish nation" (cf. Feldman, *Josephus*, 400). However, the American Philosopher and Historian Hans Kohn introduces the aspect of "One Law" (cf. *Nationalism*, 39). And as such, the "One God, One Law, One People" parlance summarizes the teleological agenda of the book of Joshua.

20 The scepticism/resistance towards nationalism is based on its occasional link with war and violence. For instance, the Irish sociologist, Siniša Malešević, *Nation-States and Nationalisms*, 91, argues that "nationalism is not only linked to revolutions and wars but also to violent insurgency, terrorism, ethnic cleansing and genocide." Yet, biblical political ideas appear foundational to modern nationalist agenda. See: Siniša Malešević, *The sociology of War and Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Graham Hamill, *The Mosaic Constitution: Political Theology and Imagination from Machiavelli to Milton* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Andreas Wimmer, *Waves of War: Nationalism, State Formation and Ethnic Exclusion in the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Eran Shalev, *American Zion: The Old Testament as a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

The concern is ethical in nature. In the attempt to deliver Israel from slavery and re-activating the covenantal promises of the land (Gen 12,7; 15,13-16; 17,7-8; 24,7; 46,3-4), the fate of the Canaanite nations appears imperilled (cf. Gen 15,16-21; Exod 3,8). This divine plan has led to resentment, leading to the book's labelling as a genocidal or massacre tale. And even when archaeological and historical evidence tends to redeem the proper, salvific image of the book, underscoring that the conquest narratives do not delineate Israel's concrete history,<sup>21</sup> the fact that texts could sometimes do more than they say<sup>22</sup> imposes diverse hermeneutical strands.

Moreover, the overwhelming statistical evidence regarding the references to *Hērem* in the book of Joshua is curious. *Hērem* simply means "ban", that is, to utterly devote or set apart someone or something to YHWH for destruction. Now, out of the 102 references to חרם (either as a verb or a noun) in the Hebrew Bible, 27% of its usage occurs in the book of Joshua. *Hērem* is used 28 times within the book. Next to the book of Joshua in descending order is the book of Deuteronomy, with 11 appearances of חרם. Based on this statistical fact, the extrapolated conclusion that the book of Joshua is genocidal is not far-fetched.

Indeed, the evaluative criteria leading to the above perceptions appear to have literarily (i) adopted the biblical portrait of YHWH as a warlord and (ii) interpreted the biblical conquest narratives outside of its pre-axial cultural context. To this end, Baumann's unmasking of the behavioural traits of pre-axial deities becomes instructive. She argues that the biblical texts adopt the neo-Assyrian narratological strategies without seeking to recount factual historical events but to create Israel's unique identity around YHWH.<sup>23</sup> Eckart Otto believes that although texts

21 Provan *et al.*, *Israel*, 138–92, do not regard the conquest narrative as a reliable historical account of how Israel came to possess the land of Canaan. Collins, *Violence*, 61, openly asserts that all but conservative apologists have now abandoned the historicity of the conquest story as found in Joshua simply because the archaeological evidence does not correlate with the biblical description of the recounted conquest. Similarly, Dever, *Early Israelites*, 37–74, asserts that little can be salvaged from Joshua's stories of the destruction of Canaanite cities and the annihilation of the local population; it simply did not happen, and the archaeological evidence is indisputable.

22 Gunn and Fewell, *Hebrew Bible*, 205.

23 Baumann, *Gott als Kriegsherr*, 87–92, reveals some obvious similarities. First, the supplication of the neo-Assyrian king Esarhaddon to the goddess Ishtar (681–669 BC) for the latter's divine intervention to overpower his enemies is similar to the narratives in Jos 1,3–6; 10,8 and 11,6. Second, the recorded voluntary submission of nations to the Assyrian king and his army parallels the

and pictorial renditions of the pre-axial times are incredibly exaggerated, the human-divine violent collaboration in the pre-axial tradition aims at demonizing kings and affirming their deities' superiority.<sup>24</sup> In other words, the conquest narratives are not historiographical but historicized accounts. Unfortunately, however, the conquest chronicle still comes across as Israel's thought-out implementation of a nationalist, expansionist, or supremacist agenda, setting a bad precedence for subsequent mass killing in human history. Brueggemann finds such texts embarrassing and morally repulsive, insisting that they are capable of causing theological problems, not because of their violent nature *per se* but because violence is perpetrated in the name of or through the hands of YHWH.<sup>25</sup> Juergensmeyer's solution of a metaphoric reception of such texts<sup>26</sup> further aggravates the hermeneutical complexities. Such an approach, Seibert thinks, "encourages one to accept biblical claims, adopt its values, and embrace its assumptions without necessarily giving serious consideration to the implications of their consent."<sup>27</sup>

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action of the Gibeonites leaders in Jos 9. Third, archives of the ANE literature show evidence of peoples and/or kings who formed coalitions against threatening super-powers. This phenomenon corresponds to the narrative in Jos 10,1-5; 11,1-6. Fourth, the shameful-death or decapitation of the opposing kings was common in pre-axial time – such was the case of the Elamites' king. This practice is highlighted in Jos 10,16-26. And lastly, the actions or recommendations on total annihilation of enemies are found both in the biblical conquest narratives (Deut 7,1-6.16.24; 20,10-18; Jos 6,17-27) and in ANE literature (Mescha-stele of the Moabite king).

24 Otto, *Krieg und Frieden*, 48-49, notes that the human-divine collaboration in perpetuating violence is possible because the neo-Assyrian "political theology" regarded the royal institution as a tool in the hand of the Assyrian gods – a sort of demonization of the King. The often-demonstrated superiority of the neo-Assyrian army is directly linked to the superiority of the neo-Assyrian deities. Otto further alludes to 2 Kgs 18,35 as an instance, where the neo-Assyrian king taunted the deities of defeated nations – YHWH in this case. However, he maintains that although some Moabite and neo-Assyrian texts and pictorial renditions serve as historical sources in understanding the phenomenon of human-divine violence when compared with other documents on the same events, they overstated and exaggerated what happened. They serve a propagandist purpose. And so, the gruesome and violent biblical conquest narratives either serve as a critique or a mere adaption of the neo-Assyrian military propaganda.

25 Brueggemann, *Divine Presence Amid Violence*, 11.

26 Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, 122, notes: "in most cases, religious violence is a deliberate and exaggerated construct that seeks to achieve the most significant symbolic impact – a call to sincere conversion. When the violent biblical narratives are carefully observed, one notes that the stage where violence is perpetuated is carefully chosen for maximum effect, just as the timing of the violence is frequently a matter of choice for symbolic purposes."

27 Seibert, *Violence of Scripture*, 54.

Consequently, does the book of Joshua indeed portray or seek to establish an exclusive Israel hegemony, which is intolerant and insensitive to ethnic and/or religious pluralism? Honest narratological considerations for contemporary socio-political and religious consumption seem pressing. Such hermeneutics would imply a holistic review of the book, starting with the elucidation of the rationale(s) behind the conquest.

## The Rationale Behind Conquests in Joshua

The book of Joshua is divisible into two grand segments. The first segment reports Israel's preparation and execution of the conquest (cf. Jos 1-12). The second half accounts for Joshua's allotment of the land and his farewell speeches (cf. Jos 13-24). Interestingly, Jos 13-24 receives less attention than Jos 1-12. Such impartial attention seems licit, to an extent, because Jos 13-24 is a direct consequence of the conquest. And as such, the consideration of the book of Joshua easily provokes synonymy with the Canaanite conquest.

Just as Jos 1-12 lays the foundation for Jos 13-24, the Pentateuch also serves as the basis for the entire Joshua corpus. The Joshuarian conquest, for instance, implements the Pentateuchal *Hērem* agenda (Exod 23,23-25.33; Num 33,50-56; Deut 7,1-6.16; 20,16-19) and ensures a continuum for the conquest narratives, which began with the Transjordanian nations (cf. Exod 17,1-8; Num 21,1). Moreover, the Pentateuch offers a double rationale for the Israel-Canaanites conflict. While the first advanced reason for the conquest is cultural, the second provides a theological explanation.<sup>28</sup>

First, the final days of Noah and his genealogical account proffer the first rationale to the Israel-Canaanite conflict. Many stories in the book of Genesis punctuate sibling rivalry. The latter is evident in scenarios like Cain vs Abel (Gen 4), Jacob vs Esau (Gen 27) and Joseph vs his brothers (Gen 37). In explaining the root cause of the Conquest, Gen 9,18-28 indicates another narratological scenario of a family tension that degenerates into ethnic rivalry. The responses of Noah's

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<sup>28</sup> Hawk, *Joshua*, xxx, notes the rationale behind the conquest "links ethnic intermingling (that is, a turn to social plurality) with apostasy (a turn to theological plurality).

children to the nakedness of their father explode into a circle of violence that transcends the immediate. While Ham sees their father's nakedness and derisively speaks about it (Gen 9,22),<sup>29</sup> Shem and Japheth cover their father's nakedness, looking away (Gen 9,23). Ham perpetuates physical violence against his father. To this direct violence, Noah responds with cultural violence. He curses the offspring of Ham (Canaan), blesses and places Shem and his descendants over them (Gen 9,26-27).

“Cursed be Canaan;  
lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers.”  
“Blessed by the Lord my God be Shem;  
and let Canaan be his slave.  
May God make space for Japheth,  
and let him live in the tents of Shem;  
and let Canaan be his slave.”

Now, while Gen 10,6.15-19 clarifies that the Canaanite nations are descendants of the cursed Canaan, the genealogy in Gen 11,10-26 presents Abraham as the descendant of Shem. The first biblical reference to the Canaanite nations and Israel's family tree occurs in these genealogical accounts (Gen 10; 11). From a cultural-anthropological viewpoint, the scenario in Gen 9,25-27 seeks to establish the root cause of tension between the descendants of Shem (Israel) and Canaan (the Canaanite Nations). Noah's jinx establishes cultural complexity among his descendants so that the conquest initially comes across as the implementation of the ancestral curse placed on Canaan.

Second, YHWH's multiple complaints about the sinful state of the nations serve as a theological rationale for their destruction. The first manifestation of such criticism occurs in Gen 13,13 and Gen 15,16.18-21. In other words, YHWH refers to the iniquities and idolatrous preferences of the Canaanite nations as a

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29 The action of Ham, father of Canaan, goes beyond just a mere report of what he saw. The Hebrew נגד (Hiphil) primarily means announcing or reporting something conspicuously before someone. This would mean that Ham announces his father's (Noah) nakedness. Beyond his words, the place of such report also plays an important role in interpreting Ham's actions. Ham speaks of his father's nakedness in the open – הרץ (outside or street).

cogent reason for awarding their land to Israel (cf. Gen 15,15-21; Deut 9,3-5). Subsequently, the *Hērem* clause (Exod 23,23-24.33; Num 33,51-56; Deut 7,1-6; 20,16-18) was established on these theological bases, that is: (i) the nations' idolatrous penchant and (ii) Israel's effort to remain faithful to YHWH. The Pentateuch provides the background information about the occupants of the land, their ungodly way of life and how YHWH promises to give the land to Israel as an everlasting inheritance. In other words, the conquest primarily envisages religious uprightness, with no room for syncretism. Concerning the rule of engagement, the Pentateuch stipulates the *principle of no mercy* (cf. Exod 23,24; Num 33,51; Deut 7,2.16; 20,16). The nations and their gods ought to be eliminated. Whether this principle is categorically implemented or not, a forensic evaluation of the book of Joshua in handling pluralism appears revelatory.

## The Joshuarian Approach(es) in Handling Differences

The above arguments show that the book of Joshua does not exclusively stand in the Hebrew canon without evident links with its bordering texts.<sup>30</sup> However, the book of Joshua is not without its originality. While the book appears as a continuum or fulfilment of the Pentateuch, it does so not in a blind, linear conformist manner but ensures the latter's developments. The implementation of the *Hērem* clause is one of the instances where Joshua ensures the Pentateuchal updates, adopting a triadic progression: (i) the elimination of enemies, (ii) the conversion of enemies, and (iii) the conversion of the self. In other words, Joshua navigates through the disturbing trends of religious exclusivism and inclusivism and finally settles for the respectful recognition of religious pluralism and freedom.

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30 According to Lohfink, *Deuteronomistic Movement*, 36-66, the term Deuteronomistic describes the linguistic, stylistic, and thematic influence of the book of Deuteronomy on its subsequent biblical books (Jos-2 Kings). Wenham, *Deuteronomic Theology*, 141, establishes the link between Deuteronomy and Joshua on the basis of five theological leitmotifs – the role of Joshua, the conquest, the land, Israel's unity, and the covenant.

## *Hērem* through Elimination of the Enemies

Out of its twenty-four (24) chapters, the book of Joshua reserves a quarter for the conquest narratives. Six chapters of the book explicitly report the conquest (Jos 6-8; 10-12). The latter takes a double dimension. On the one hand, Joshua follows the Mosaic “us” vs “them” approach that ethnic/cultural differences between Israel and the nations determine the enemies set apart for destruction. To this end, the people of Jericho and Ai, the five Amorites kingdoms, and Canaan northern nations were utterly destroyed. Here, the conquest seems more of an ethnic rivalry between Israel and the nations.<sup>31</sup>

On the other hand, the Achan idolatrous scenario in Jos 7 places the conquest in its proper teleological perspective, as it explicitly expands the scope of Israel’s enemies. The incorporation of Jos 7 as part of the conquest narratives stresses two crucial points. First, the book of Joshua redefines the identity of enemies. The nations are not the only inimical target group, as enemies can also arise within Israel. In other words, the implementation of the *Hērem* clause applies to both insiders and outsiders. Second, the criterion for identifying the enemies is primarily theological. Israel’s enemies include those who do not profess YHWH and uphold the *Yahweh-centric* agenda. This approach to implementing the *Hērem* clause presents a paradox whereby Israelites may become outsiders, and the outsiders may become part and parcel of Israel.<sup>32</sup> Hence, the argument of national or

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31 Until this point, the Joshuarian conquest or the destruction of the Canaanites nations comes across as Israel’s means of ensuring her identity formation or construction. See: E. Theodore Mullen Jr., *Narrative History and Ethnic Boundaries: The Deuteronomistic Historian and the Creation of Israelite National Identity* (SemeiaSt; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993); Kenton L. Sparks, *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel: Prolegomena to the Study of Ethnic Sentiments and Their Expression in the Hebrew Bible* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1998); Carly L. Crouch, *The Making of Israel: Cultural Diversity in the Southern Levant and the Formation of Ethnic Identity in Deuteronomy* (VTSup 162; Leiden: Brill, 2014); Ruth Ebach, *Das Fremde und das Eigene: Die Fremendarstellungen des Deuteronomiums im Kontext israelitischer Identitätskonstruktionen* (BZAW 471; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014); Mark R. Glanville, “הרם (*hērem*) as Israelite Identity Formation: Canaanite Destruction and the Stranger (גֵר, *gēr*).” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 83, no.4 (2021): 547-570.

32 Glanville, *Israelite Identity Formation*, 555, notes that “the הרם command has to do with the formation of Israel, communicating in the strongest possible terms that Israel must eschew idolatry.” Also, Ebach, *Fremde*, 311, concedes, maintaining that the representation of the nations in the *Hērem* command reflects Israel.



ethnic descent plays a contingent role in the implementation of the *Hērem* clause, as absolute faithfulness to the *Yahweh-centric* agenda becomes crucial.

Consequently, Joshua's initial implementation of the *Hērem* seems to orient itself theologically rather than its purported ethnic colouration. His execution of the *Hērem* shows that the conquest is not primarily an ethnocentric agenda<sup>33</sup> but a religiously-motivated campaign; the worship of YHWH is at the centre of it all. Contrary to perceptions that simply label the conquest as the Israel-nations battle, the book clearly defines it as the battle between the *pro-* and *anti-*YHWH parties. Joshua's initial implementation of the *Hērem* clause adopts an exclusivist approach.

### *Hērem* through the Conversion of Enemies

In executing the *Hērem* clause, Joshua gradually distances himself from the stipulated rule of engagement – *the principle of no mercy*. He also refrains from a strict exclusivist approach to embracing religious inclusivism. The latter hints at Joshua's openness to the possible conversion of the nations.

The first of such instances is observed in the incorporation of Rahab and her household into YHWH's chosen community. The depicted scenario in Jos 2 is similar to Num 13 in that Joshua follows the Mosaic tradition by sending spies to Jericho. Unique about the Joshuarian spy saga is the dialogue between the spies and Rahab. This dialogue confirms that the main criterion for engaging in conquest is theological. Rahab's profession of the supremacy of YHWH and her willingness to identify with Israel facilitate her inclusiveness into the Israeli community.<sup>34</sup>

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33 Said, *Canaanite Reading*, 166-167, argues that the identity perception of enemies or strangers is not exclusively binary – that is, Israel and the rest. As such, a retrospection may be needed before concluding that *Hērem*-texts represent a nationalistic polity that is bent on genocide.

34 Rahab seems to be very familiar with the Deuteronomic tradition (Deut 3,24; 4,10; 4,39; 5,8; 10,14; 26,15; 29,3; 31,13). As such, Glanville, *Israelite Identity Formation*, 561, affirms Rahab as “the exemplary Deuteronomy figure, who declares the very words of Moses.” In effect, Braulik, *Deuteronomy and Human Rights*, 149, considers Rahab's words as a necessary confession to facilitate her incorporation into Israel. Also see: Firth, *Models of Inclusion and Exclusion in Joshua*, 77–79.

I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that dread of you has fallen on us and that all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before you, for we heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom *you utterly destroyed*. As soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no courage left in any of us because of you. The Lord, your God, is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below. Now then, since I have dealt kindly with you, swear to me by the Lord that you, in turn, will deal kindly with my family (Jos 2,9-12).

Interestingly, Rahab stands as the first person in the book of Joshua to refer to the *Hērem* (Jos 2,10), whose implementation then occurs in Jos 6. The latter highlights the reward of Rahab's confessional statement. At the destruction of Jericho, Joshua commands that Rahab and her household be spared (Jos 6,17). Everything in Jericho was subjected to *Hērem* except Rahab (Jos 6,24-25). Nevertheless, the Rahab episode suggests two crucial insinuations regarding Joshua's initial approach to the conquest. First, while Joshua simply sends spies to Jericho, Rahab perceives or interprets their presence as a tactic that would eventually end in *Hērem*. Perhaps, Joshua and the spies are not considering the implementation of *Hērem*, but Rahab's reference to such a possibility seems to have triggered its implementation. Second, the fact that the report of Rahab inclusion-story (Our life for yours! – Jos 2,14) comes before the main conquest suggests that Joshua's primary reception of the *Hērem* clause differs from the radical stipulations in Deut 7,1-6 and 20,16-18. Joshua seems open to dialogue, conversion, and inclusion of the nations.

Furthermore, two similar scenarios suggest Joshua's inclusivist approach in the book – the Gibeonites treaty (Jos 9) and the dialogue between the Trans/Cis-jordanian tribes (Jos 22). In the case of the Gibeonites, they expressed readiness to be subsumed into the Israel community as servants, committing to the *Yahweh-centric* agenda. As for Israel's Transjordanian tribes, they reiterated their ardent commitment to YHWH. In both cases, dialogue is crucial to avoid the implementation of the *Hērem*.

In addition to the Rahab and Gibeonites self-submission, the book also singles out some nations which cohabited with Israel in the land. Such is the case of the Geshurites or the Maacathites (Jos 13,13), the Jebusites (Jos 15,63), the Canaan-

ites who lived in Gezer (Jos 16,10), and the Canaanites in Jos 17,12-13. To an extent, this welcomed inclusivist development explains that the hegemonic “one God, one law, one people” agenda in the promised land seems illusory. Therefore, it is demonstrable that Joshua permits the inclusion of the nations into Israel’s polity.

Nonetheless, it is unclear if the above-mentioned Canaanite nations voluntarily submitted themselves to Israel, like Rahab and the Gibeonites did. In effect, the inclusiveness of individuals or nations into Israel’s society does not theoretically recognize nor guarantee their social and religious freedom (Jos 9,23; 16,10; 17,13). The suspension of the *Hērem* and the *modus operandi* of the conversion process follow a single direction – the recognition, readiness, and commitment to embrace YHWH (Jos 2,11; 9,19-20; 22,21-29).

### The Conversion of the Self

To begin with a disclaimer, the presence of the nations in the land does not falsify the claims that Israel conquered the entire land (Jos 11,16.23; 21,43). The impression given in Jos 23,5-16 regarding the “remaining nations” among Israel does not negate Israel’s complete possession of the land.<sup>35</sup> On the contrary, the claims in Jos 11,16.23 and 21,43 are valid because the allotment exercise (Jos 13-21) denotes Israel’s ownership and control over the land.<sup>36</sup> However, the presence of the nations’ remnant in the land indicates the heterogeneous configuration of Israel’s polity from its inception and explains the rationale behind Joshua’s farewell speeches at the end of the book (Jos 23-24).

Thanks to Joshua’s farewell speeches, several questions within the book receive clarification. First, it becomes evident that the *Hērem* clause was not blindly executed; a remnant of the nations remained in the land. Second, the remnants’ presence in the land indicates Joshua’s inclusivist approach based on the *Yahweh-centric* agenda. Third, following the Achan idolatrous saga in Jos 7, the cov-

35 The divine utterance in Jos 13,6 – *I will myself drive them out from before the Israelites; only allot the land to Israel for an inheritance, as I have commanded you* – suggests that the conquest is complete on the part of Israel, as YHWH now takes the sole responsibility “to clean up the debris” of the conquest. In his farewell speech (Jos 23,5-7) Joshua reiterates this point, buttressing a pure divine responsibility for the conquest, and that the conquest is complete on the part of Israel. What is expected of it, henceforth, is covenantal faithfulness.

36 Cf. Kaufmann, *Conquest of Palestine*, 84.

enant renewal in Jos 8,30-35, and the affirmation of Israel's consistent faithfulness in Jos 23,8, the existence of other gods in the land referred to by Joshua during his farewell speeches (Jos 23,12-13; 24,14-15) could only have been perpetrated by the remnants of the nations. Fourth, Joshua's emphasis on Israel's avoidance of the nations and their gods during the farewell speeches (Jos 23,6-7.12-16) suggests that as long as the nations cohabit with Israel, the possibility of having foreign gods in the land remains undisputable – a realistic recognition of religious pluralism.

Consequently, Joshua's farewell speeches disclose Israel's first-hand experience of cultural and religious pluralism (23,5.7.12.13.16; 24,14-15.20.23). Such recognition provokes Joshua's exhortation regarding Israel's expected attitude towards the nations and their gods. But contrary to the adopted violent militaristic approach in the first half of the book (Jos 1-12), the farewell speeches enjoin Israel to simply avoid the nations and their gods and not to kill them (23,12-13.16; 24,23).<sup>37</sup> Such a significant step signals Israel's acquired maturity as a nation and implies that it is possible to coexist in a pluralistic society yet remain faithful to YHWH. Moreover, Israel's recognition (not in the sense of acceptance) of cohabitation with the nations and their gods in the land serves a sacramental purpose. The nations and their gods become living symbols of what YHWH is not and signs of what Israel ought not to be. Their presence hints at the awaiting disaster if Israel ventures into idolatry. Hence, the pluralistic nature of the polity constantly calls and reminds Israel of its true identity and prepares it to engage in the decision-making process from an informed perspective. Israel knows how a nation fairs under the reign of the divine candidates for election (Jos 24,15).

Furthermore, Joshua recognizes religious pluralism as intrinsic to a heterogeneous society, and as such, respectfully evokes Israel's religious rights and freedom by inviting the people to choose between YHWH and the foreign gods (Jos 24,14-15). This election in Jos 24,14-18 is strategically unique. Contrary to Moses, who placed important choices before Israel but did not allow them to air their voice (Deut 30, 15-20), Joshua leaves Israel with the option to embrace or reject YHWH. Joshua's personal choice to serve YHWH together with

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37 Cf. Gordan, *Together in the Land*, 189. What is interesting about the avoidance phenomenon is that it implicitly sets the stage for the recognition of religious freedom in Israel's polity.

his household (24,15)<sup>38</sup> ultimately affirms the people's unreserved rights to choose and underscores that certain decisions, such as religious affiliation, ought not to be imposed.<sup>39</sup> In effect, Joshua's placement of the foreign gods alongside YHWH during the election confirms that Israel lives in a pluralistic society with multiple religious options. Despite the polity's pluralistic configuration, Joshua restrains from imposing a common religious identity but instead allows the people to choose whom to serve. Bloodshed and coercion now appear unacceptable within the polity, as rational, dialogical, and consensual processes within an atmosphere of freedom depict Joshua's handling of pluralism.

Succinctly, in evaluating Joshua's reaction to religious differences, a holistic evaluation of the book reveals a triadic progression of religious exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. To emphasize one over the others amounts to selective reading or sieving of the book. While the first adhered strictly to the *Hērem* clause, the second offered a possible dialogical window on the sole condition that the nations embrace the *Yahweh-centric* agenda. However, the polity's multicultural and religious configuration compels Joshua to recognize religious pluralism, rights, and freedom. Joshua finds religious exclusivism through *Hērem* and religious inclusivism through coercion or persuasion as unhelpful political tactics. A situational analysis of his context propels an inward-looking approach, suggesting Israel's own spiritual conquest and conversion through constant faithfulness to YHWH. Hence, in the quest to ensure a formidable nation within a pluralistic polity, Joshua records significant progress through an orientation shift from an outward-centred to an inward-attentive approach.

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38 A similar scenario is found in Gen 35,2-4 and 1 Macc 2,20.

39 Quong, *Public Reason*, 246, argues that respect for persons and free election implies that people are not coerced on grounds that they cannot reasonably accept. While there is no single definition of religious freedom, Fox, *Religious Freedom*, 325, suggests possible scenarios indicating the absence of religious freedom. They consist of: (i) restricting the religious practices of minorities, (ii) regulating all religion in the polity, and (iii) promulgating laws or institutions which enforce religion. In Joshua's farewell event, there are no attempts to intimidate or eliminate the nations and their gods. Joshua simply encourages Israel to avoid and desist from religious syncretism or idolatry. Also, Joshua did not directly or indirectly try to impose the worship of YHWH on the people. Instead, he simply declares his own stance on the issue, expecting the people to determine their own deity (religion).

## The Relevance of Joshua's Approach for Today's Polity

The fast-emerging rate of national secessionist movements across the globe based on linguistic, cultural, and religious reasons is alarming.<sup>40</sup> This trending phenomenon signals the dwindling of tolerance, equality, and recognition of shared humanity. It also indicates a growing global failure in managing pluralism. Hence, drawing from the Joshuarian attitude towards diversity management, the paper offers succinct credible suggestions for engaging a pluralistic polity.

First, the panoramic consideration of the book of Joshua, especially in the last two chapters, systematically suggests what modern pluralistic societies must avoid – violence. The book reveals how unwarranted focus on differences of whatever sort, cultural or religious, can motivate violence in the social space. In other words, immature emphasis on social or religious exclusivism often leads to violence. The book of Joshua eventually rejects violence and the propagation of a closed society in responding to pluralism.

Second, the book emphasizes the crucial need for inclusiveness in obtaining social cohesion. Although the dialogue process in the Joshua corpus seems one-sided (Jos 2; 9), the take-home point for a pluralistic polity is that an authentic political dialogue must necessarily lead to a win-win situation for peaceful cohesion. The demand of Rahab following her confessional statement underscores this point.

Now then, since I have dealt kindly with you, swear to me by the Lord that you, in turn, will deal kindly with my family. Give me a sign of good faith that you will spare my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.” The men said to her, “Our life for yours! (Jos 2,12-14).

Third, although the theocratic rule was the leading political system during biblical times, Joshua's farewell speeches greatly appreciate democratic tenets such as respect for religious pluralism, the rule of law (Jos 23,6; 24,22), openness and respect for religious rights and freedom. These features permit respectful avoidance and not gruesome elimination of foreign or opposing traditions. It reflects a

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40 Cf. Huntington, *Clash of civilization*, 125-130.

call to authenticity that ensure unity which does not impose uniformity. Here, the German expression “*Leben und leben lassen*” becomes salvific.

Fourth, Joshua proposes the most feasible approach to handling religious pluralism. He emphasizes the need for self-transformation (Jos 24,22-24) in place of violent elimination or forceful conversion of the opposition(s). Unless there is a culture of inner renewal through self-criticism, illusory hegemonic agenda and suspicion of others would escalate into violence and eventually beget self-destruction. Therefore, Joshua’s final approach in handling religious differences, which focuses on recognizing pluralism, dialogue, self-transformation, and freedom of choice, remains a valuable treasure for contemporary pluralistic societies.

Fifth, the holistic consideration of the Joshua corpus reveals the aspect of societal growth and maturation in the handling of differences. The triadic progression from exclusivism to inclusivism and then pluralism buttresses that the democratic embrace of plurality in the polity is a work in progress. In other words, the acceptance of plurality is not an ideal intrinsic to human society. Instead, it grows, develops, and flourishes thanks to the “hands-on-deck” determination of stakeholders. The embrace of pluralism is a decisive decision and conscious commitment.

Finally, Joshua’s eventual approach to handling cultural/religious differences demonstrates an extraordinary development within its pre-axial context. Rather than violently imposing Monotheism, Joshua champions Monolatry, of which Israel ought to focus on YHWH. Joshua acknowledges the possibility of serving several gods but campaigns for YHWH in a polite and enlightened manner at the end of the book. However, as a way of critique from a contemporary evaluative angle, the Joshuarian sense of pluralism may not be equated entirely to the modern understanding of pluralism, which emphasizes equality. In other words, from the contemporary viewpoint, Joshua’s embrace of pluralism is limited in that Israel’s suspicious perception and relational disposition towards the nations raise questions concerning equality in the polity. Although Joshua recognizes Israel’s cohabitation with the nations, the fact that Israel welcomes their presence with suspiciousness, cautiousness, and avoidance questions, to an extent, the genuineness of such cohabitation. Israel perceives the nations as an endless temptation. Is it still possible that Israel lives together in the land with the nations without seeing the latter as representatives of what they ought not to be and/or the “devil”

they are not? Laudable as the Joshuarian approach appears, I think the world has evolved beyond what Joshua could have imagined in his time.

Hence, in addition to the Joshuarian approach, a healthy recognition of pluralism in today's democratic dispensation implies the building of cultural bridges, the nursing of encounters and not avoidance, where there is a mutual and respective recognition that every person in the human society is on the same journey of life, even when the paths are different (cultural, gender, linguistic, and religious). Within this purview, YHWH ought to be imagined beyond the imagination of one single community but with many faces.

## Conclusion

The paper establishes that a *pars pro toto* approach to biblical interpretation, especially violence-related texts, seems impractical. The book of Joshua demonstrates several approaches to managing a pluralistic polity. A holistic evaluation of Joshua's engagement of nations depicts a triadic progression of religious exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. To emphasize one over the others amounts to selective reading or sieving of the book. Crucial in Joshua's handling of diversity is the significance of strategic reviews and updates. His experience of threat from within (Achan) and depth of faith from outside (Rahab) warrants polity restructuring. While the centrality of YHWH remains ultimate, the effectiveness of Joshua's handling of pluralism lies in his continuous actualized review and update of societal happenstances, thus facilitating the gradual movement from violence to respectful dialogue, accountable freedom, and spiritual conversion.



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# The Catholic Social Teaching on Religious Freedom: A Theological Response in Indian Context

*Subbaiah Gabriel Chapala*

## **Abstract:**

India is a secular country that guarantees religious freedom as one of the fundamental rights of every citizen. It has taught the world the concept of “non-violence.” The founding fathers of the Indian republic Gandhi, Nehru, B. R Ambedkar, and Maulana Azad viewed the Indian culture as inclusive and composite. On the contrary, there grew up an ideology of Hindutva (1925) propagated by Hindu nationalist organizations who exclusively equate the Indian culture to Hindu culture. The ideology of Hindutva violates not only the secular nature of India but also the very strength of India’s “unity in diversity” and pluralism. Christians are considered not as ‘citizens’, but as ‘foreigners’ and ‘second-class citizens.’ Therefore, the essay addresses the challenges to religious freedom by Christians in India in line with the official teachings of the Catholic Church in dogma *Dignitatis Humanae*.

**Keywords:** *Religious freedom, Dignitatis Humanae, secularism, Hindutva, Religion*

## Introduction

Religious freedom is critical to the health of a diverse society. It allows different faiths and beliefs to flourish. It protects the rights of all groups and individuals, including the most vulnerable whether religious or not. People around the world need physical, social, and legal space to practice their religion. I have divided this paper into three parts. The first part highlights the teaching of the Catholic Church on religious freedom in the Pre-Vatican II era. The second part deals with the official teaching of the Church on religious freedom and its relationship with the state in the light of the dogma of the Second Vatican Council *Dignitatis Humanae* (1964). The third part presents the contextual situation of religious freedom in India in the sight of Christians.

## Pre-Vatican

Since the earliest times, The Catholic Church has been reflecting on the proper understanding of religious freedom and its relationship with the state. Tertullian (C.155-240) was said to have coined the expression *libertas religionis* (religious freedom). He defined it as “a fundamental human right, a privilege of nature that everyone should worship according to one’s own convictions.”<sup>1</sup> But the position of the Church (Catholic) on religious freedom until the Protestant Reformation (1517-1555) was negative. It had neither considered religious freedom as a fundamental right nor let the religious minorities to it. Instead, it had condemned it through papal documents. This extreme intolerant act of the Church was the cause that led to the Protestant Reformation on religious freedom. Consequently, the Church was driven out of its feudal privileges, and properties, and to the end of Christendom as a relatively united imperial system. There was a violent wave of religious and military battles between Catholic and Protestant powers. The Church, with the Council of Trent (1545-1563) that began as Counter-Reformation started to defend religious freedom as a “human basic free will, as a power giving us control over how we decide and act, over what at the best of our own decisions we believe.”<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, it was limited to Catholic beliefs and practices only. Interestingly there was an exercise of ‘coercion’ within the catholic tradition. Thus, religious freedom was a concept only accepted by a few. With the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) peace was established between Protestants and Catholics and religious minorities were tolerated but not raised to hold public offices by the state as per the doctrine of *Cuius region, eius religion*.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the Church maintained the *Ancien Regime* till the Age of Enlightenment (1650-1800).

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1 O’ Mahony David, “Religious Freedom: The Catholic Approach,” *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 19, no. 1 (January 2017): 41-49.

2 See especially the *Council of Trent*, Session VI, canon 5 of the decree on justification of 13 January 1547: “If anyone says that, after the sin of Adam, human free will was lost and blotted out, or that its existence is purely nominal, a name without a substance, indeed a fiction introduced into the church by Satan: let him be anathema.” *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* volume II, ed. Norman Tanner and Giuseppe Alberigo (Georgetown: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 679.

3 *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (3 rev. ed), eds. F.L Cross and E.A. Livingstone (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 438. Lat., ‘In a prince’s country, the prince’s religion/. this formula adopted at the Religious Peace of Augsburg in 1555, by which the princes

During the Age of Enlightenment (age of reason) political philosophers particularly Thomas Hobbes (*Leviathan: On Human Nature*, 1651) and John Locke (*Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 1686) had applied the notion of humanity through reason in questioning the traditional authority of the Church which later became the key source for the development of liberalism. Thereby, the Church began to teach religious belief as *sacrosanct de jure* and it cannot be *de facto* ‘forced’ by any authorities. Later, religious belief was looked at entirely as an issue about public cult and practice.<sup>4</sup> However, there was a paradigm shift in the Church’s teaching on whether a person could be ‘forced or not’ in religious matters to the ‘person centered’ in religious liberty.

The intellectual reasons set by the philosophers of the Enlightenment on culture (bourgeois class) and politics (like the inefficient leadership of French monarch Louis XVI) had led to the French Revolution (1789-1799) which overthrew the monarchy of France. In the 1780s, the population of France was around twenty-four million and seven hundred thousand and was divided into three Estates. The First Estate was the Roman Catholic Clergy, who owned 10% of the land though it comprised less than 0.5% of the population. It was wealthy, paid no taxes, and had many privileges, including *tithes* (one-tenth of the annual produced for the support of the church).<sup>5</sup> French nationalist liberalism under a new form of secularist orthodoxy took intolerant methods toward Catholics and separated the state and the Church. Consequently, French liberalism did not only take away the power and property of the church but also limited the Church’s role to private affairs only (called aggressive secularism). Initially, the Church did not react to liberalism thinking that it would be limited to France. However, when the French government drafted the “Civil Constitution of the Clergy” (1790) which divided the French government and French Catholics, the tension began to escalate.<sup>6</sup> The Draft reads: “Would the clergy obey the Roman Catholic Church or French government? As per the France First Constitution of 1791, the King had veto power

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of the Empire were to be permitted to settle whether the religion of their own lands should be Roman Catholic or Lutheran.)

4 Cf. *Council of Trent*, Session VI, canon 5 of the decree on justification of 13 January 1547, 679.

5 Anirudh, “10 Major Causes of the French Revolution,” *Learnodo Newtonic*, December 1, 2018, <https://learnodo-newtonic.com/french-revolution-causes>.

6 Joe Holland, *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: The Popes Confront the Industrial Age, 1740-1958* (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 37.

to appoint ministers of the Church.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the priests were forced to obey the government. But some of the clergy strongly opposed the government while others embraced Gallicanism (rejection of the Pope’s authority and obedience to local bishops). However, at the end of its Revolution, France had adopted the *Declaration of Rights of Man and of the Citizen* by its National Constituent Assembly which replaced the *Ancien Regime* with a system based on equal opportunities, and freedom of speech, sovereignty, and a representative government.

### Church’s Response to Liberalism and Modernism

The Church was ‘anti-liberalism’ in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and ‘anti-modernism’ in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The modern ideas are modern state, democracy, liberalism, human rights, human dignity, freedom of the press, separation of state and church, freedom of conscience, and religious freedom. Gregory XVI, in the encyclical *Mirari Vos* (1832), rejected modern ideas, particularly the fundamental freedom of conscience, separation of the state and the church, and religious freedom because of their roots in indifferentism.<sup>8</sup> He argued that freedom of conscience was a ‘form of insanity,’<sup>9</sup> and religious freedom on the premises ‘error has no rights’ and as such ‘only the Catholic Church holds the truth,’ can be granted religious freedom. Pius IX, in the encyclical *Quanta Cura* and the *Syllabus of Errors* (1864), too condemned the separation of the Church and the state and religious freedom for immigrants in Catholic countries.<sup>10</sup> But he wanted Catholicism as the state’s official religion. Although he was initially sympathetic towards the liberal approach, he stepped back due to *Italian Risorgimento* (rising again) which had conquered the papal state Vatican and Rome (1860-1870). Unmistakably the liberal and modern ideas brought the Church in Europe under attack and thus, the pope became ‘the prisoner in the Vatican.’<sup>11</sup> Hence, the Church, in turn, provoked

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7 “French Revolution,” *History*, last updated February 4, 2021, <https://www.history.com/topics/france/french-revolution>.

8 <https://www.papalartifacts.com/portfolio-item/pope-gregory-xvi/>.

9 David Hollenbach S.J., “Human Dignity in Catholic Thought,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Human Dignity: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, eds., Marcus Düwell, Jens Braarvig, Roger Brownsword and Dietmar Mieth (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 251.

10 *Syllabus of Errors*, no. 55, 77& 78.

11 John Loughlin, “Religious Freedom in Domestic Politics and International Affairs,” *Which Path to Religious Freedom? A Catholic Perspective on International Affairs*, ed. Mathias Nebel (Ge-



a strong reaction among secular liberals and Protestants. This extreme situation of polarization and antagonism between secularists, the secular state, and the Church in Europe was the context, in which the concept of religious freedom was considered.<sup>12</sup> Joe Holland, an eco-philosopher, a Catholic theologian calls this period (1740-1878) ‘Anti-Modern Church Strategy’<sup>13</sup> because of its rejection of modern ideas defending the *aristocratic Ancien Regime*.

### A Paradigm Shift in the Church’s Teaching

With the papacy of Leo XIII (1878-1903) the church began to accept modern ideas of freedom of speech and press on the condition only for “what things soever are true and honorable,” but condemned the rights to “laying opinions” (*Libertas* 23). He accepted the ‘modern state’ realizing the impossibility of the church to return to its previous form of the state and the society. In the ‘modern state,’ man precedes the state, and the legal and government institutes are blessed to respect the free exercise of religion and to provide space for an active role of the Church in public life. However, while he did not give up the Church’s reticent position on religious freedom, he insisted on the need for the Church to get along with modernity. He invited French Catholics to participate in the politics of the modern state and to be part of the Republic known as ‘*le ralliement a’la re’publica*. In the encyclical *Nobilissima Gallorum Gens* (On the religious question on France; 1884) Leo XIII called French Catholics to defend the Church without opening themselves to accusations of hostility to establish a government.

Thus, Leo XIII, unlike his predecessors, went beyond condemning liberalism and modernism. The Church was committed to reform itself to liberalism, democracy, industrialism, and all in the name of a modernized bourgeois version of Eurocentric Christian Civilization. Some of his encyclicals on politics are *Diuturnum* (1881), *Immortal Dei* (1885), *Libertas* (1888), *Sapientiae* (1890), and *Rerum Novarum* (1891). On one hand, there was a great shift in the Church’s relationship with the state. On the other hand, the Church began to renew its intellectual life with the revival of the teaching of Thomas Aquinas and with the contemporary

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neva: The Caritas in Veritate Foundation, 2013), 12, <https://www.vhi.st-edmunds.cam.ac.uk/research/publications/fciv-wp2>.

12 John Loughlin, “Religious Freedom,” 12.

13 Joe Holland, *Modern Catholic Social Teaching*, 2.

philosophical movement. The outcome of the intellectual movement was great scholars like Jacques Maritain and Francois Mauriac (1920s and 1930s) who contributed to the development of the Church in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) was a French Catholic philosopher who helped in reviving the teachings of Thomas Aquinas for modern times and was influential in the development of drafting of *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR 1948). In his political philosophy *Humanisme intégral: problèmes temporels et spirituels d'une nouvelle chretiente* (1935) he emphasized the importance of reconciliation of the Church with modern democracy and religious freedom. In *Man and the State* (1951), he highlighted the fundamental presentation on 'rights' which was later adopted in *Dignitatis Humanae*. His philosophy is 'human freedom.' He describes that 'freedom' is not that of license or pure rational autonomy, but the realization of human nature according to one's nature in achieving both temporal and spiritual perfection. He also differentiated human being as an 'individual' and as a 'person.' The human being as an 'individual' is related to common social order, of which one is a part, and the human being as a 'person,' one is an object of dignity, which must be treated as an end.<sup>14</sup> Human being has a transcendent tendency. His argument on religious freedom was not framed in terms of 'truth and non-truth,' but on the level of 'human person.' (Of course, it was contrary to the previous teaching of the Church's premises that 'error has no rights' and only the Catholic Church holds the truth). While insisting on the need for reconciliation of the church with the state, he demarcated the distinct role of the state and of the Church. The "state," according to him, "must not encroach upon matters of religion," however, "that does not imply, as far as it comes to the moral and religious realm, the state should stand aloof and be reduced to sheer impotency."<sup>15</sup>The state exercises its power only as subject to moral and religious realms. Simultaneously it has "no power to impose any faith whatsoever upon, or expel any faith whatsoever form, the inner domain of conscience."<sup>16</sup> Whereas the Church has been entrusted with a 'spiritual mission,' which must be safeguarded

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14 Les droits de l'homme et la loi naturelle, New York: Éditions de la Maison française. [The Rights of Man and Natural Law, Doris C. Anson (trans.), (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), 84, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/maritain/>

15 Martain, *Rights of Man*, 84.

16 Martain, *Rights of Man*, 84.

by the state. Thus, he argued that the Church has no right “to political power or the temporal advantages to which certain of its members might lay claim in its name.”<sup>17</sup> He emphasized the need for cooperation between the body of politics and the Church.

Though some members of the church had opposed his ideas of reconciliation of the church with the modern state, democracy, and religious freedom, his philosophy of ‘human freedom’ and ‘human person’ made the Church reflect on the theology of religious freedom and its relationship with the state, focusing on the human person as both a member of the church and one who lives in the state. He, along with all Catholic intellectuals, strongly opposed the dictatorship of Franco and opted for democracy during the inter-war period (1909-1938). After World War II, his writings became a reference in the field of politics to European Christian Democracy which became the leading Christian (catholic and protestant) political movement in France, Italy, Belgium, Germany, and Latin America as well. Of all these, the German Christian Democratic Union was the most successful.<sup>18</sup>

### Theological Justification

With the encouragement of Leo XIII, the theological justification by catholic theologians like Karl Rahner, Josef Ratzinger, Yves Congar, and Edward Schillebeeckx under the movement *la nouvelle theologie*<sup>19</sup>(1935-1942) was developed. The Church was concerned with the application of “*ressourcement*” vision in the pluralistic views like relationship with other churches (ecumenism) in the field of religious freedom, tolerance, diplomatic relationship with civil authorities, society, and government in the multi-cultural context of contemporary western

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17 Martain, *Rights of Man*, 84.

18 Andre’ Munro, “Christian democracy,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, April 11, 2013, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Christian-democracy>.

19 A French “new theology” or ‘ressourcement’ Theology is a theological movement that set the stage for the Second Vatican Council which shows that the Christian tradition is a vital and dynamic force that is not retrograde, but progressive. They developed that the theology had to speak to church’s present situation and its relevance lay in the creative recovery of the past the church’s 2000 years treasury or tradition. It is known as *aggiornamento* had to be *ressourcement* rediscovery of the riches of the church. in the first phase 1935-42 Dominican theologians Congar, Chenu prominent who wanted to return the teachings and example of St. Thomas. *Ressourcement*. Second phase 1942-50 Jesuits like Lubac and Danielou were influential theologians.

society. It had challenged the concept of 'pure nature' of *Neo-Scholasticism* that dominated catholic theology until the 1960s.

Henri de Lubac, S.J (1896-1991) in his *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* (1944) argued that the elements of atheistic humanism had destroyed Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He challenged the *neo-scholastic* doctrine of 'pure nature' that saw human nature with two distinct ends: one of them is the natural end. It means, man in his human nature is completely capable of attaining its end; the second of it is the supernatural end, where it (human nature) attains its end only by God's grace (known as the theory of *duplex ordo*). Lubac argued that the neo-scholastic philosophy of 'pure nature' finds no place for mystery and paradox, and self-sufficient order. Thus, *dualism* was the cause for the development of the atheistic philosophies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and had flourished within communist and fascist governments which were responsible for the widespread violence and repression in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, he argued that humans cannot understand themselves fully and much less God. Therefore, Lubac affirmed that the revelation of God is also the revelation of man to himself. Thus, Lubac said, the Church began to play the primary role in the society to offer the world a vision of its true self, healed and transformed in the image of Christ. He suggests:

Nothing is more superficial than the charge made against her (the church) of losing sight of immediate realities, of neglecting man's urgent needs, by speaking to him always of the hereafter. For in truth the hereafter is far nearer than the future, far nearer than what we call the present. It is the Eternal found at the heart of all temporal development which gives it life and direction. It is the authentic Present without which the present itself is like dust which slips through our hands. If modern men are so absent from each other, it is primarily because they are so absent from themselves, since they have abandoned this Eternal which alone establishes them in being and enables them to communicate with one another.<sup>20</sup>

According to him, the Church in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was not relatively interested in the problems of the European society because it had endorsed the view that

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20 Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: A Study of Dogma in Relation to the Corporate Destiny of Mankind* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1958), 201.

nature, including ‘human nature’ and civilization, is self-sufficient and ‘grace’ is an extrinsic addition to the nature, a kind of bonus not needed for the proper functioning of the society. Therefore, the Church from the time of the French Revolution to the Mid-twentieth century considered freedom of conscience and religious liberty linked with a secular agenda which marginalized the Church from its engagement in public life. Three centuries later the Church has accepted religious freedom in dogma *Dignitatis Humanae* (1965).

## Vatican Council II: *Dignitatis Humanae* 1965 (Postmodern Church)

With the Vatican Council II, the Church emerged (from Europe) into the ‘World Church/ Global Church’ with its engagement in ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, social justice, and peace. It went beyond the philosophical and geo-cultural framework. John XXIII, commenting on the forthcoming of the Vatican Council II, said: “Religious liberty is one of the fundamental rights which the Church can never renounce, which is not merely freedom of worship.” He further stated: “The Church vindicates and teaches liberty and cannot renounce it because it is inseparable from the service and is bound to fulfill.”<sup>21</sup> The dogma *Dignitatis Humanae* was promulgated by Paul VI in 1965 approved by 2,308 and opposed by 70 Council fathers.

*Dignitatis Humanae* (*DH*) is a pivotal step in the far-reaching development of Catholic social teachings in the light of the contemporary context. It addressed issues such as human dignity, human rights, the role of conscience in religious freedom, healthy relationships between the state and the Church, the duties and responsibilities of government, ecumenical dialogue, and interreligious dialogue. One needs to read *DH* from the socio-politico-religious context of Europe and America to understand the mind of the Church. John Courtney Murray, S.J., an American theologian, said that the Church was late on religious freedom, and it should learn from America’s tradition of religious liberty in a pluralistic view of

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21 John XXIII. Radio Address, September 11th, 1962. EWTN. <http://www.ewtn.com/vatican2/ideaForCouncil.asp> (accessed January 15, 2022).

religion unlike European society (homogenous). He defended the U.S.A Constitution saying that democracy and pluralism were good for the state and its citizen.

*DH* consists of 15 articles. The core teaching of it is contained in article 2:

“This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, *within due limits* (...) This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed and thus it is to become a civil right.”

### Religious freedom is a fundamental human right of an individual and a group

The Council teaches religious freedom is intrinsically a human right grounded not in the subjective disposition of the person but in their very nature. A Person is endowed with reason, freedom, and responsibility simultaneously. Their moral duty is to seek the truth, i.e., religious truth (Catholicism), and embrace it. *DH* 14 gives utterance to it, the truth of Christ himself who took the human nature. Theologically human dignity is found in the *Image of God* (Gen 1: 26-27). None, but God bestows the dignity and honor upon man. Therefore, a human being is an absolute and inviolable worth. For instance, Christians see the invisible God in the very person of Christ who took the form of human nature. Therefore, human dignity and human rights are divinely granted to humans through Jesus Christ.

*DH* 4-8 speak of religious freedom as a collective right/ a group right. Humans are social beings by their very nature. They live in groups to perform rituals and social works. Hence, they should be free to express their faith, but not to the extent of ‘infringing into the rights of others.’ The Council refers particularly to the rites of different churches which are to be respected. It reiterates that human dignity is the basis of religious freedom. The state is not to interfere in religious matters of groups. Instead, it should sanction families’ education of children in religious matters. Prior to the Church, this right was recognized by *UDHR* (1948) in article 26: “Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be

given to their children.” The Council demands from constitutions of the world to recognize religious freedom not only as a fundamental civil right of an individual, but also as a group right.

### Religious freedom should be free from coercion

J. Murray, an American theologian, defines the term coercion in the following: “By coercion is meant all manner of compulsion, constraint, and restraint, whether legal or extralegal. It includes things such as social discrimination, economic disadvantage, and civil disabilities imposed on grounds of religion. Today, it importantly includes coercive forms of psychological pressure such as massive propaganda, brainwashing techniques, etc.”<sup>22</sup> Coercion either externally or internally by the state or by the church in the choice of religion is strictly forbidden. If it is by force, it is not the true meaning of religious freedom.

The Council throughout the dogma has not mentioned freedom of conscience. The Church teaches that conscience is not the medium to know the divine law. The Divine law is imperative which is known through the mediation of conscience (*DH 3*). I will do whatever my conscience dictates, is a dangerous theory. It is primarily based on subjective truth rather than on objective truth. True religious freedom is not licensed to support error, nor implicit right to error, but a natural right of the human person to civil liberty. John Paul II, in *Veritatis splendor* (no. 9 & 10) says that the true conscience calls us to obey the law of God but does not itself tell us what the law is (revelation of God through the Holy Spirit). However, the Council teaches that no human authority on earth is entitled to exercise coercion against one’s own conscience or to judge one’s conscience true or false. But ‘within due limits’ (*DH 2*) the state can force an individual or a group. Jesus never forced anyone to follow him. He refuses a political ruling by force. Instead, Jesus wants us to worship God in spirit and truth (Jn. 4:22-24). Man’s response to God must be free.

### Church and State Relations

“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mk 12;17), says Jesus. The politico-socio situation of Europe and the USA

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22 J. Murray, “The Problem of Religious Freedom,” *Theological Studies* 1, (1964): 503-575.

was fully different. Europe was a homogenous society full of wars (16<sup>th</sup>&17<sup>th</sup>centuries) and had undergone aggressive secularism where the Church's power was limited to private affairs by the state. Whereas the USA is a pluralistic society. The First Amendment of the USA (1791) does not separate church and state. It prohibits the government to establish a particular religion. Besides, it protects citizens' right to practice their religion as they please, so long as practices do not run afoul of a 'public moral' or a 'compelling' governmental interest. Murray argued for the need for a relationship between the church and state without denouncing the Church's stand on 'there is no salvation outside of the Church.' But Cardinal Ottaviani and his supporters argued, the state that does not worship God in line with the Church's teaching has no right to grant religious freedom. Maritain and Murray had emphasized and called for a revision of the classical modern doctrine on the Church and state relationship. To them, democracy and pluralism are good for the state, citizens, and the Church. Johannes Janssens, a catholic German historian defended the position of Maritain and Murray insisting on tolerance in the modern world. He said tolerance is a "necessary expression of a charity that acknowledges the fundamental significance of personal freedom both for human dignity and for faith itself."<sup>23</sup> He rejected the hypothetical idea that 'the state itself must worship God.'

Leo XIII had replaced the fatal theory of 'separation of state and the Church' with the doctrine of 'distinction and Cooperation,' which was the fundamental teaching of the Church from the time of St. Gelasius I (492-496). Unfortunately, it was ignored by the Church and the nobles in the *Ancien Regime*. Hence, Leo XIII stressed that it was the official teaching of the Church on its relationship with the state. As per the doctrine of Distinction and Cooperation, sacred and civil powers are of divine origin and independent but work together. They are 'independent' and 'co-operative' as well. The foundation of these two concepts is found in the belief that there may be freedom of religion but not freedom from religion.

However, the Church on one side accepts the sovereignty of the state and on the other hand, it demands from the civil government to recognize religious free-

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23 Joseph A. Komonchak, "The Struggle for the Council During the Preparation of Vatican II (1960-1962)." *History of Vatican II*, Vol. 1. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A., eds. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1987), 296.



dom as a civil and fundamental right and then protect it simultaneously. It asks states to be 'neutral,' but not indifferent. The Church was fully aware of Article 18 of *UDHR*, which states:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

### Ecumenical and interreligious dialogue

J. Murray defended the theory of 'Intercredal Co-operation' (ecumenism) in the work of social justice. But many of the Council fathers opposed the theory. To them, the theory of "Intercredal Cooperation" would lead Catholics to indifferentism towards the truth of the Catholic religion. The Church in Europe had experienced it due to liberalism in the past. Whereas the American Church has many denominations that immigrated from Europe. Catholic theologians like Karl Rahner, Henri de Lubac, Joseph Ratzinger, and Yves Congar have focused on the theology of ecumenism. In the past, both Catholics and protestants fought against Nazism and Fascism despite Counter-Reformation towards other denominations. The postmodern Church has made conscience a pivotal point and common ground to bring churches together. Respecting everyone's conscience both 'inside' and 'outside' of their communities and tolerating each other is of primary concern. Ecumenism aims to overcome schisms through dialogue and unite Christians in the Truth. Religious freedom should not lead to "indifferentism" or "relativism," it is free without denouncing its Christian preeminence or religious truth. The Church's official Dogma on ecumenism is *Unitatis Redintegratio* (1964).

The Council teaches the need for interreligious dialogue. The Church begins to see that there is some truth in other religions. The Church accepts that all religions have the same quest for the truth, but it searches for truth only in Christian revelation. Interreligious dialogue is a necessary tool to solve moral and ethical problems in society. Conscience becomes the meeting point for Christians and non-Christians with which dialogue begins. The official teaching of the Church is expressed in *Nostra Aetate* (1965). Thus, the Church takes no double standards on

religious freedom. It is being led by the signs of the time. The 1960s is the spirit of the age, known for optimism, tolerance, and social welfare in the West.

## Religious Freedom in the Context of India

India is home to 1.4 billion people. It is one of the most religiously and ethnically diverse countries in the world with 94% of the Hindu population worldwide. As per the Census of 2011, it consists of Hindus (79.8%), Muslims (14.2%), Christians (2.3%), Sikhs (1.7%), Buddhists (0.7%), Jains (0.37%),<sup>24</sup> and smaller communities like Bahá'í, Zoroastrians (Parsis), and animist faiths practiced by ethnic groups. It is believed by scholars that Judaism came to India in 562 BCE, Christianity in 6 A.D, Islam in 7<sup>th</sup> A.D, and Zoroastrianism c.7-10 A.D.

The concept of religious tolerance became one of the key features of India's civilization from the Ancient (6000 BCE-650CE: the Indus Valley civilization one of the world's earliest, 3300 BCE- 1300 BCE, located in modern-day Pakistan and Northern India) and the Medieval period (475-1500 CE: the Islamic golden age in the world and India). Religion became increasingly important and influential at the time of the crusades (1096-1291) in the West. The concept of secularism in Indian history began with the reign of King Akbar (1542-1605) who introduced a new religion namely *Din-E-Ilahi* (religion of God) intending the unity of all faiths. In post-Independent India (1950), secularism has become one of the traits of Republic India, but not the whole of it. Despite its secular character, India has experienced communal violence due to hate speeches made by political parties on religious grounds. Some of the key incidents of communal violence took place in the 1960s, 1980s, 1983s, 1984s, 1985s, 1987s, 1989s, 1992s, and 2008s. The victims were mostly religious minorities such as Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs. Thus, communal violence has indirectly become a feature of Indian politics to date. The word 'secular' was not inserted in the preamble of the Constitution of India (1950) despite Prof. K.T. Shah's demand in the Constituent Assembly, held on November 15, 1948. Later, in 1976 (the Emergency period), it was inserted

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<sup>24</sup> Ministry of Home Affairs, "RGI releases Census 2011 data on population by religious communities," August 25, 2015.

into the preamble of the Constitution by the 42<sup>nd</sup> Amendment. The Constitution of India guarantees its citizens religious liberty as one of the fundamental rights (article 25) and sanctions special rights for minorities against discrimination on grounds of religion and caste. The primary object of Indian secularism is to respect all religions equally (Sarva Dharma Sambhava) and to remain neutral towards religions (Dharma nirpekshata) *i.e.*, it is neither anti-godliness nor anti-religious.

### Two Views of Indian Culture

The first view of Indian culture is composite and inclusive, enriched by the contribution of different religions and traditions that absorbed into the mainstream of Indian culture. The fruit of composite culture had led to secularism in India. The protagonists of this view are Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, B.R. Ambedkar, and Maulana Azad. They believed that unity in pluralism was/is the strength of Indian culture. Historically, with the rise of the Vedic system, the crystallization of the caste system was presented. But the culture of the caste system was attacked by indigenous religions, Buddhism and Jainism. Buddhism (5 BCE) insisted on the principles of humanity, equality, compassion, justice, and non-violence that secured ethos. Jainism (7-5 BCE) insisted on the principle of non-violence (*ahimsa*).

S. D. Sharma observes, “the advent of early Christianity and Islam in India was thus peacefully accepted, supported, and ascribed to not only out of the spirit of co-existence but also with a certain sense of identification.” Islam developed the style of architecture and paintings. They have their basis in the tradition of ancient India and are unmistakably Indians. The Britishers had developed in the field of education, scientific attitude, political institution, political equality, and liberty which took a form in the Constitution of India. Abid Husain says, the British gave us a “new concept of individual and national freedom, and a preliminary training in the democratic technique of public life.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, every religion without any exception has contributed to the development of Indian culture. Therefore, Indian culture is something dynamic and vibrant, and not static. It represents a fusion of various streams and is composite and inclusive. It would be static when someone says that Indian culture is only Hindu culture.

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25 S. Abid Husain, *op. cit.*, 122.

Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) believed that the essence of Hinduism is brotherhood and peace. It teaches us to respect all religions equally (Sarva Dharma Sambhava). To Gandhi, all religions lead to the same God. All are true. All proceed from the same God, but all are imperfect because they reach us through imperfect human instrumentality.<sup>26</sup> However, religion is a personal matter of an individual. The secular state can look after only the citizens' welfare, health, communications, foreign relations, and other issues, but not religion. He said: "What conflict of interest can there be between Hindus and Muslims? The difference can only be in religious usage and observance with which a secular state has no concern."<sup>27</sup> It was easy for Gandhi to appreciate the ultimate truth. He found religion never an obstacle to the growth of the secular state. True secularism, according to Gandhi is not the absence of religion in public affairs nor neutrality of the state towards religion and its affairs, but not let a particular religion dominate over the other. The state should treat all religions equally and uphold the harmony of all (co-existence of all). His concept of secularism comes from the *Vedic* view of unity in multiplicity. It agrees with the Church's doctrine of Distinction and Cooperation in its relationship with the state. He believed that religion and state are inseparable. Because the irreligiosity, encouraged by the state, leads to the demoralization of the people and the state's religious policy should be pluralistic with equal respect to all religions.

Religious tolerance becomes an integral part of Gandhi's philosophy. Tolerance is not to be understood as 'indifferent' but as a more intelligent and purer love for it. It should be far from fanaticism as the north from the south, giving only a spiritual realm. The true knowledge of religion breaks down barriers between faiths. It was stated that Gandhi was not happy with the use of the term 'tolerance' which implies the assumption of superiority and inferiority of faiths. Instead, he used the term '*ahimsa*'<sup>28</sup> (non-violence), the central teaching of Jainism in reference to respecting all religions equally with their imperfections. He insisted on the

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26 Young, *India*, 24.

27 Aishwarya S Iyer, "From Gandhi to Vajpayee, A Lesson on Secularism for Minister Hedge," *the Quint*, accessed 3 oct. 2021, <https://www.thequint.com/news/india/gandhi-vajpayee-secularism-in-india-debate>.

28 As per Jain scripture, *ahimsa* means not to injure, abuse, oppress, enslave, torment, torture or kill any creature or living being.

unity of Hindu- Muslims which the Indian civilization could not survive without. Whenever the sectarian violence broke out between Muslims and Hindus, he went on a fast to death till the peace among them was restored. On the other hand, he insisted on the establishment of *Ram Rajya* (the kingdom of Lord Rama). According to him, the term '*Ram Rajya*' indicates not a *Hindu Raj*, but only the kingdom of God. He stated: "Rama and Rahim are the same deity. There is one God of truth and righteousness."<sup>29</sup> He strongly opposed the politics of revenge and retribution. He wanted religion to be set apart from politics because morality is the basis of any religion. Religion becomes meaningful when it helps in the practical life of every individual. Thus, he considered religion without morality a deadly sin and religious intolerance a sign of weakness and not strength. He identified three types of religious intolerance: religious bigotry, religious mockery, and religious conversion. Though he claimed to be liberal, opposed religious conversion especially of the "Untouchables."

Jawaharlal Nehru (the first prime minister of republic India), who is also known as the architect of Indian secularism, strongly opposed superstitions, communalism, and religious fanaticism. The Constitution of the Republic of India grants freedom of religion (article 25) as a fundamental right and maintains neutrality without any discrimination (*Dharma nirpekshata*). However, religious freedom is not absolute, subject to public order, morality, and health. He was against nationalism grounded on religions such as Hindu nationalism, Muslim nationalism, Christian nationalism, etc. Instead, he wanted to see an industrial civilization based on a scientific approach in India. Though he was initially against religion, he later accepted it as one of the most crucial factors in the lives of human beings in Indian society. His view of religion lies in John Dewey: [R]eligion is "whatever introduces genuine perspective into the piecemeal and shifting episodes of existence"; or again "any activity pursued on behalf of an ideal end against obstacles and despite threats of personal loss, because of conviction of its general and enduring value, is religious in quality."<sup>30</sup> His concept of a secular state cannot be identified with any religion or anti-religious philosophy? but remains neutral.

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29 Young, *India*, 24.

30 Rajeev Bhargava, "Nehru against Nehruvians: On religion and Secularism," *New Perspectives on India and Turkey: Connections and Debates*, eds. Smita Tewari Jassal and Halil Turan (New York: Routledge, 2018), 114.

Ambedkar, who was the chief architect of the Indian Constitution and inspired by the teachings of Lord Buddha, believed in the secularism of the spirit of the Constitution through fundamental rights and Directive Principles of the State Policy incorporated in the draft. His social secularism contains the principles of justice, equality, and fair play.

The second view of Indian culture is exclusive. It equates Indian culture with Hindu culture. The protagonists are the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh), the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), and its allies of *Hindutva* propagated by Vinay Damodar Savarkar in 1923. The RSS is a militant Hindu nationalist organization that seeks the roots of Indian culture in the ancient period of Hindu culture and ethnicity. It has developed its public policy and a large number of its affiliated organizations (*Sangh Parivar*) promote *Hindutva* as a concept of cultural revitalization and political mobilization that ‘seeks to subjugate and homogenize the ethnic pluralities by establishing the hegemony of an imagined cultural mainstream.’

According to this view, non-Hindus (Christians, Muslims, and Zoroastrians) should respect the features of the Hindu nation and glorify only Hinduism. They must give up the attitude of intolerance and ingratitude toward the land and its age-long tradition, and then get into this culture. They (non-Hindus) must cease to practice foreign religions (especially Christianity) or else live in India as ‘subordinate’ or ‘second class’ citizens to the Hindu nation, claiming no special privileges, not even citizens’ rights (known Ultra-Nationalism). The adherents of *Hindutva* actively hate and fear other religions, especially Islam and Christianity. They argue that Indian culture is rooted in none other than the Vedas only. They openly uphold Hindu values and a conservative agenda i.e., one culture, one religion, and one nation. M. S. Golwalkar (called Guruji), the second Sarasanghchhalak of the RSS, defined India as a Hindu nation that consists of geographical unity, cultural unity, and linguistic unity. In *Bunch of Thoughts*, he considered Christians, Muslims, and Communists ‘internal threats.’ He viewed Christians as follows:

“Such is the role of Christian gentlemen residing in our land today, out to demolish not only the religious and social fabric of our life but also to establish political domination in various pockets and if possible, all over the land.”<sup>31</sup>

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31 M.S. Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts* (Bangalore: Sahitya Sindhu, 1996), 193.

Christians need to be first loyal to their birthplace and heritage handed over by their ancestors. The slogan reads: “Hindu, Hindi, Hindustan.” On the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the RSS, the then Sarasanghchalak K.S. Sudarshan called upon Christians and Muslims of the country to prove their patriotism.<sup>32</sup> They call the activities of Christians irreligious and ‘anti-national’. ‘Irreligious’ because Christians abuse Hindu gods, Hindu scriptures, and goddesses and ‘anti-nationals’ because Christians function as ambassadors of the West or Vatican.

This sort of view of Indian culture divides people of one nation into ‘we’ and ‘others’ or ‘us’ and ‘them’ on religious grounds. It completely ignores the impact of other religions and the other components like architecture, language, and philosophies on Indian culture. It diverts the very notion of diversity to a more hierarchical rather than a plurality. It aims at establishing the superiority of Hindu identity over Semitic religions, and their cultures. It also violates the constitutional fundamental rights of equality (articles 14-18), religious freedom (article 25), and religious minority rights (article 30). It opposes the constitution for not containing anything of development in ancient Bharat. Instead, they aim at creating a Hindu nation/ *Hindu rashtra* to be governed by *Manusmriti* which decrees the sub-human status to Sudras and Women. It presents both Hinduism and Casteism as synonymous. One cannot be without the other.

### Politics of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Secularism

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is the political wing of the RSS, a national party that rules the country (2014-to date). The Constitution of India is secular, but the state institutions of bureaucracy, judiciary, army, and police are infiltrated by Hindu communal elements. Even some of the leaders of secular political parties were influenced by Hindu nationalist ideology. In the late 70s and 80s communalism took a strong boost and gave the BJP an advance to take the communal rhetoric tone. It had openly declared its agenda of establishing *Hindu Rashtra* (Hindu nation). On this ground, there was a social, ideological, and political onslaught on secular ethos. During the national election campaign, the BJP had tried to legitimate the concept of secularism as a concept that originated from the Christian West. It is a complete misinterpretation of facts. The concept of secularism is not rooted

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32 [https://www.academia.edu/676529/KNOW\\_THE\\_RSS\\_BASED\\_ON\\_RSS\\_DOCUMENTS](https://www.academia.edu/676529/KNOW_THE_RSS_BASED_ON_RSS_DOCUMENTS), 1.

in the Christian West but in the secular West. It originated in western societies not simply based on religious rubrics alone but on diverse sources. The BJP argues that the West on matters of faith and secularism is formed from the point of view of homogenous attitudes, practices, and social structures (cultural system). According to Allport, a psychologist, the argument of the BJP on secularism creates confusion among people about what primary psychology among Hindus is. However, the BJP was successful to make respondents believe that Hindutva is synonymous with Hindu.

Anant Kumar Hegde, a minister of the BJP, stated that the BJP has come to power to remove ‘secular’ from the Constitution, and further stated, “I will be happy if someone identifies as Muslim, Christian, Brahmin, Lingayat or Hindu. But trouble will arise if they say they are secular.”<sup>33</sup> The Chief Minister of the State of Uttar Pradesh Mr. Yogi Adityanath (BJP Minister) said the word “secular” is “the biggest lie” in India.<sup>34</sup> In addition, the *Sangh Parivar* (the family of Hindu nationalist organizations) is against the chief principle of ‘equality of all’ enshrined in the Constitution. L. K Advani, one of the senior leaders of the BJP, too emphasized that “India’s culture is essentially a Hindu culture” and he says, claims that “emphasizes on the composite character of Indian culture is generally an attempt to disown its essentially Hindu spirit and content.”<sup>35</sup> Kanayalal M. Talreja, a minister of the BJP, argued that pseudo- secularists “have hatched a sinister conspiracy to destroy Hindu culture and Hindu civilization by introducing the psyche of the nation, two malicious and mischievous concepts of “composite nation” and “composite culture”<sup>36</sup> Ashok Singhal, the international working president of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), called Modi’s reign a “Hindu revolution” that would culminate in “Hindu world” by 2030.<sup>37</sup>

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33 <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/hegde-kicks-up-a-fresh-row-with-remarks-on-secularism/article22271584.ece>.

34 <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/yogi-adityanath-says-secular-word-the-biggest-lie-since-independence-1775109>.

35 L.K. Advani was quoted in A.G. Noorani, “The way of the Law,” *Frontline*, vol. 10, no.11, no. 3, (1993), 50.

36 Kanayalal M. Talreja, *Pseudo-secularism in India*, (Mumbai: Rashtriya Chetana Prakashan, 1996), 366.

37 <http://hinduexistence.org/2015/07/18/india-will-be-hindu-rashtra-by-2020-and-a-hindu-world-by-2030-ashok-singhal/>



One of the Christian leaders observes the ideology of Hindutva in the following: If Christians in India are not controlled, they would convert all Hindus and Hindutva would lose its identity. Hence, the RSS wants to go to any extreme to stop. Consequently, Christians face physical violence, and expulsion from the community. The political elites fail to practice the constitutional provision. In the history of post-independent India, they have created a deep-seated conflict between communities in line with the fundamental right to belief, despite their incongruity with public order and morality if they are advantageous to them. Mr. Rahul Gandhi, the then president of the Indian National Congress (INC) political party said: “The RSS is running the government; it has planted its people everywhere. Even secretaries in ministries are appointed by the RSS.”<sup>38</sup> It was further substantiated by Siddharth Varadarajan (a journalist and commentator) on the release of the book *The RSS: A Menace to India*, authored by A.G Noorani. He stated:

“The RSS is ruling India. Let’s make no bones about it. It is an organization which calls itself a cultural entity, but no one has any idea about its membership, structure, and finances. They have exploited every loophole to keep its finances opaque.”<sup>39</sup>

### Challenges to religious freedom

Although the communal violence mostly targeted Muslims, Christians have been also increasingly under threat since the 1990s.<sup>40</sup> Violence against Christians reached its peak in 2008 and 2009, and again in 2015. Demographically, Christians are the majority in four states in the Northeast- Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Arunachal Pradesh. In the south, the largest Christian population states are Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The contemporary challenges to religious freedom are

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38 Anilesh S. Mahajan, “The saffron hand: How RSS and its affiliates are reshaping government policy,” *India Today*, April 26, 2018.

39 Quraban Ali, Book Release: “The RSS: A Menace to India,” *Lokayat*, April 15, 2019, <https://lokayat.org.in/2019/04/15/>

40 Chad M. Bauman and James Ponniah, “Christian Responses to Repression in India and Sri Lanka: Religious Nationalism, Legal Restriction, and Violence,” in *Under Caesar’s sword: How Christians respond to persecution*, eds. Daniel Philpott and Timothy Samuel Shah (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018): 262.

secularists, religious fundamentalism, hegemony, aggressive secularism, ultra-nationalism, and jingoism. Religious freedom and human dignity are in constant danger. In the wake of the attacks, Catholic Julio Ribeiro, a prominent former Indian police officer, civil servant, diplomat, and recipient of the prestigious *Padma Bhushan prize*, wrote that in his eighty-sixth year in India, he for the first time felt “threatened, not wanted, reduced to a stranger in my own country.”<sup>41</sup> The most important challenges that Christians face in India in the light of religious freedom are anti-conversion laws, the Presidential Order of 1950, and the violation of human rights.

*Anti-Conversion Laws:* Religious conversion in India is dated back to the time of the Partition of India in 1947. It has become an issue because of the demographic decline of Hindus and a growing number of Muslims and Christians that provoked restrictions on the conversion of Hindus, especially to Christianity and Islam. It creates a lot of disadvantages for the *Dalits* who use conversion as means to protest injustice done to them in Hinduism. Anti-Conversion laws are brought under the clause: subject to public order and moral duty particularly against Christians, and to prevent ‘coercive,’ and ‘fraudulent’ conversions. The content and implementation of the law ‘infringes upon the individual’s right to convert, favors Hinduism over minority religions, and represents a significant challenge to Indian secularism.’<sup>42</sup> As per the anti-conversion law, when a Hindu wants to embrace Christianity, they need to get permission from the district magistrate three months prior lest they will be fined. On the contrary, the same law is not applicable when a Christian converts to Hinduism. Therefore, the law favors Hinduism and is one-sided. It violates the constitutional provisions of the right to equality and religious liberty on religious grounds. Out of twenty-nine states in India, nine state legislations have passed laws, restricting religious conversions, with laws in force in seven states (Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Uttarakhand). In the past and the present as well, Christians have been accused of ‘forced conversions’ despite little evidence for the claim. On the other hand, Hindu nationalist groups particularly

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41 Julio Ribeiro, “As a Christian, Suddenly I am a Stranger in My Own Country, Writes Julio Ribeiro,” *The Indian Express*, March 17, 2015, <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/i-feel-i-am-on-a-hit-list/>, accessed January 2, 2022.

42 US Department of State, *International Religious Freedom Report 2007*, September 2007.

the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (VHP; serves and protects Hindu Dharma) operate *Ghar Wapsi* (returning home) campaign aimed at bringing back the converted Christians into the Hindu fold. It has been justified by the RSS based on their predecessors, who were converted from Hinduism through proselytization or force. On the contrary, there was a forceful conversion of 57 Muslims into Hinduism in 2014.<sup>43</sup> In 2015, April, the then Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh of the BJP called for a national level anti-conversion law under the pretext of stopping communal violence. The critics opposed it on the ground of violation of the fundamental right to religious freedom.<sup>44</sup>

*Presidential Order of 1950*: It is the biggest intersectional discrimination where particularly Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians face the lack of the official recognition as ‘Scheduled Castes’ (SCs). According to the Presidential Order: “No person who professes a religion different from Hinduism shall be deemed to be a member of Scheduled Caste.” Consequently, Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims are prevented from accessing the reservations sanctioned by the Constitution, including certain protections and benefits available to Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists Dalits.<sup>45</sup> The Constitution of India recognizes Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism not as distinct religions but grouped along with Hinduism. The Exact number of Dalit Christians and Muslims is unknown. Some estimate Dalit Muslims are approximately close to one hundred million.<sup>46</sup> It is said, 50% of Christian converts come from the lower castes (known as Untouchables). Along with Muslims and Christians, Sikhs have been also a target of communal violence. It has intelligibly excluded the religious minorities of socially marginalized Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians from accessing affirmative action measures designed to promote

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43 Salman Ravi, “Indian Agra Muslim fear conversion to Hinduism,” *BBC News*, December 11, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-30429118>.

44 Anita Joshua, “Rajnath pitches for anti-conversion law,” *The Hindu*, April 28, 2015, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/states-should-act-against-communal-incidents-rajnath/article7150757.ece>.

45 National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, Joint State holders’ Report on Caste Based Discrimination in India, 27th Session of the Universal Periodic Review of the UN Human Rights Council – India, III UPR Cycle, May 2017.

46 International Dalit Solidarity Network, “Millions of Dalit Muslims face caste discrimination,” June 30, 2016.

equality and is one of the factors which has served to institutionalize the enduring disadvantage of religious minorities.

*Violation of Human Rights:* Human rights activists argue that there is the intervention of politicians who instigate communal violence for their political benefit through hate speeches, educational textbooks ‘ghettoization’ of minority communities, and blocking employment, housing, and other needs. Each episode is a part of a long-term ‘state-society nexus that sustains the violence and reinforces impunity.’<sup>47</sup> Indian history presents plentiful incidents of communal violence against religious minorities, yet justice is denied to the victims. Even the police personnel mostly ignore to file First Information Report (FIR) on culprits. Instead, they pressurize the victims to withdraw the cases while the police force is largely Hindu and tends to support the Hindus in any conflict. In the context of India, religion was used both as a tool to bring and weld a crowd together to inspire and motivate them for self-defensive aggression. The *Fact-Finding* conducted by the CSSS reveals that justice for minorities is ignored in various stages: They object to filing FIR because of trust in authority; they destroy the evidence and threaten, which often takes place within the criminal justice system against minorities.<sup>48</sup> Even the Aid distributed to the victims of minorities has been categorized as ‘ex gratia,’ and not as an obligation of the law on the part of the state to “make available adequate, effective, prompt and appropriate remedies, including reparation,” as per International Standards.

## Conclusion

Prior to the democratic revolution in modernity, religious liberty was not a fundamental right in the Catholic Church nor was religious tolerance raised to the level of a universal principle. It is a liberal democracy that began such a form of tolerance and enshrined religious freedom as one of man’s newly discovered

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47 Mander, H. and Singh, M., ‘Mass communal violence in independent India,’ in Farasat, W. and Jha, P., *Splintered Justice: Living the Horror of Mass Communal Violence in Bhagalpur and Gujarat*, Three Essays Collective, Gurgaon, 2016.

48 *A Narrowing Space: Violence and Discrimination against India’s Religious Minorities*, Centre for Study of Society and Secularism (CSSS), 13

fundamental rights. The Church, at the time of restoration of 1815 has been led to the concept of religious liberty in *Dignitatis Humanae*. It grew up in a larger part of social, political, economic, and religious problems in the Church though it had no longer unified under one faith and one church in the world. *DH* asserts that the basic “right of the human person to religious freedom must be given such recognition in the constitutional order of society as well make it a civil right.” And “the dignity of the person is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself.” *DH* also affirms a “harmony between the freedom of the Church and the religious freedom which is to be recognized as the right of all human beings and communities.” One can say that *DH* is a pivotal step in the far-reaching development of Catholic social teachings. The Catechism of The Catholic Church states: “The right to religious liberty can of itself be neither unlimited nor limited only by public order conceived in a positivist or naturalistic manner” (CCC.2109).

All religions in the world consider peace a value: *Shanti*, *Shalom*, and *Salaam*. Besides a spirit of ‘holy war,’ there is also a current of non-violence in the major religions. In religious pluralistic India establishing religious harmony is challenging. Hinduism has been present for over a thousand years before Buddhism (6. BCE). For instance, King Priyadarshi honored men of all faiths, religious orders, and laypeople alike. If a man extols his own faith and disrespects another, because he wants to glorify his faith, he seriously injures his own faith. The emperor Akbar (1543-1605) who was a model of the monarch from an Inter-religious point of view, had theologians from Hindu, Muslim, and Christian at his court. He animated dialogue between them and found a new religion namely *Din i-Ilahi*- (an integration of the best elements from different religions). Kabir (1440-1518; a saint and poet) who was born to Muslim parents but guided by a Hindu guru sought to promote fellowship between religions. Guru Nanak (1469-1539), the founder of Sikhism sought to integrate Hinduism and Islam.

Mahatma Gandhi (the father of the nation) in the 20th century sought to promote integration between the various religious groups in India. His *ashram* was the outcome of all religions. The Republic of India has drawn inspiration from Gandhi, Nehru, Ambedkar, and Maulana Azad and chosen a secular democratic India, but not a ‘Hindu’ state. The Constitution of India makes a broad space for religious pluralism within the unity of the Republic.

However, India does not have a religion-free secularism like that of France, where religion is privatized and religious symbols are banned from the public sphere, but a secularism respects the identity of each religion and treats all faiths equally. It is a vision of community in pluralism. But in practice, India has not proven to build it up easily. There were Hindu-Muslim communal conflicts after the Partition (Pakistan). This division was intensified by the growth of the *Hindutva* (Hindu identity) movement which claims that India is culturally Hindu, and every Indian must consider India not mere mother /fatherland, but also 'holy land.' It considers Christians and Muslims as 'foreigners,' having their roots elsewhere. The Hindutva movement started in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and developed political, cultural, religious, and agitational branches. Most Indians are secular minded. They voted for the secular Indian National Congress, a national political party rejecting the Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party for sixty-seven years since India's Independence. But now, the Bharatiya Janata Party, the political party of Hindutva is ruling the country (2014- till date).

How can we promote religious harmony in multi-religious India? First, all religions can encourage peace and provide a deep moral and religious foundations for the goal that humanity must follow and show the way of doing it: It should be in the form of dialogue. Religions need to have a positive view of other religions. The role of religion in society should be prophetic which roots values and challenges the community to change and grow and provide the motivation and inspiration for transformation. Religions should provide the ethic-spiritual foundation for society. Inter-religious dialogue offers mutual learning and challenges to change and leads to the conversion of hearts. Christianity has an official social doctrine. There are Dalit and Tribal theologies that offer liberation perspectives. Starting with the idea that humans are created in the *image of God*, human and social rights are exposed and defended. Modern leaders in Hinduism like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Narayana Guru, Mahatma Gandhi, and Vinod Bhave have provided the religious roots for the secular tradition promoting equality, social justice, and harmony based on the doctrine of *Advaita* or non-duality according to which all humans are equal and one in the Absolute. The Quran offers to society the values of equality, democracy, and justice. And in Buddhism

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar found the support for social equality of all human beings.<sup>49</sup> Through its constitution, the Republic of India has developed in the pursuits of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity.

The Pew Research Survey of 2015 reports that eight out of ten Indians say that religion is very important in their lives.<sup>50</sup> On the contrary, India, which historically taught the world the weapon of non-violence, a secular state where all religions peacefully co-exist, and that grants legal protections for religious freedom, still experiences high levels of government restrictions on religion to intimidate especially Christians and Muslims. Religious intolerance is even extended to Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs. Now, the country is slowly moving away from secular democracy to Hindu nationalism undermining the country's constitution. The present scenario of the political process is against every fundamental humane and constitutional principle of equality and dignity of every Indian. Katayoun Kishi (a former research associate of Pew Research Center) told *Quartz*, citing the High Court ruling of Chhattisgarh: "Non-Hindus were particularly impacted by the government restrictions in India in 2015."<sup>51</sup> He further said: "Officials of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) both at the center and in some of the state governments make statements that India should be exclusively for Hindus." He added: "Minority communities including Muslims, Christian, and Sikhs complained of numerous incidents of harassment by Hindu nationalist groups."<sup>52</sup> According to the Pew Research Centre survey of 2015, India stood fourth worst place for religious intolerance after Syria, Nigeria, and Iraq.<sup>53</sup> The vision of Mahatma Gandhi on India: "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows stuffed. I want the culture of all lands to blow about my house as freely as possi-

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49 For a more elaborate presentation of liberation perspectives from different Asian religions see Michael Amaladoss, *Life in Freedom: Liberation Theologies from Asia*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997.

50 Jonathan Evans and Neha Sahgal, "Key finding about religion in India," *Pew Research Centre*, June 25, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/06/29/key-findings-about-religion-in-india/>.

51 Ananya Bhattacharya, "India is the fourth-worst country in the world for religious violence," *Quartz India*, April 14, 2017, <https://qz.com/india/959802/india-is-the-fourth-worst-country-in-the-world-for-religious-violence/>

52 *Ibid.*

53 *Ibid.*

ble. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.”<sup>54</sup>Rabindranath Tagore, a Bengali poet, the great Indian nationalism visionary wanted India to awaken to the bright dawn of freedom in the following: “Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high; Where knowledge is free; where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls ...”

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54 SA Aiyar, “Why Gurusurthy and RSS need a Worldview,” *Times of India*, November 24, 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/Swaminomics/why-gurusurthy-and-rss-need-a-worldview/?source=app&frmapp=yes>.



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# Social Teachings of the Catholic Church: A Trajectory towards Radical Ecological Democracy

*Tony Bharath Kenneth Mathew*

## **Abstract:**

The Catholic Church is universal and accommodates various forms of government and their institutions. Among the forms of government, the Church considers democracy as the best. However, democracy is degenerating and its features are deteriorating. The Church morally evaluates and openly critiques whenever democracy moulders. When democracy is constantly bent to the will of oligarchs: political, economic, and media elites, the Church offers new directions to democracy. Why should the Church argue against crony capitalism? What is lacking in democracy? What form of government does the Church envisage? Why is an alternative form of governance important in the Church's view? This essay will inquire into the trajectory of the Church towards Radical Ecological Democracy.

**Keywords:** *Social Teachings of the Church, Radical Ecological Democracy, Capitalism, Post-democracy, Neo-populism, Economy, Sustainability, Self-rule, Ecology, Interconnectedness.*

## Introduction

Around the world we encounter different forms of governments, varying in constitutions, legislatures, and executive bodies. The Catholic Church respects every form of rule and its associated political freedom. The Church does not have a particular preference for a good political system. At the same time, the Church does not detach herself from everyday human concerns, moral order, and politics. The linking thread between the Catholic Church and politics is vividly portrayed in *Gaudium et spes*: “The political community and public authority are founded on human nature and hence belong to the order designed by God, even though the choice of a political regime and the appointment of rulers are left to the free will of citizens.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the Church wills that a government must manifest

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<sup>1</sup> Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World),

the order outlined by God which is established in human nature and that the features of a government should be decided by people's consent. Neither a tyrannical government which acts against the welfare of people nor a despotic government that acts against people's consent can be a good political arrangement.<sup>2</sup> A form of governance which embodies the indispensability of authority and people's consent is democracy. While affirming democracy,<sup>3</sup> the Church also cautions against our propensity to compromise morality and idolize democracy.<sup>4</sup> In recent papal encyclicals and documents popes (John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis) have criticized political authority for distorting democracy. Pope Francis expresses that the term democracy has been bent to serve as a tool for domination.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, democracy has been distorted to serve the will of oligarchs, thus giving birth to post-democracy and neo-populism. Given this bleak moral situation what kind of democracy does the Church envisage? Why should radical ecological democracy (RED) serve as an alternative form of democracy? Which arguments affirm the trajectory of the Church towards a radical ecological democracy? We will apply the universal Church's views to the Indian context.

## Features of Democracy

Indian democracy functions under both procedural and substantive dimensions. While the procedural dimensions include free, fair, and frequent elections, political equality, institutions, and constitutional government, the substantive dimensions include citizens' socio-economic equality, the principle of toleration regarding different views, and the accountability of rulers.

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Vatican website, § 74, (1965), [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html), accessed on 14.08.2021.

2 Mark Brumley, *20 Answers: Catholic Social Teachings* (California: Catholic Answers Press, 2020), 16.

3 John Paul II, *Centesimus annus* (On the Hundredth Anniversary of *Rerum novarum*), Vatican website, § 46, (1991), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_01051991\\_centesimus-annus.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus.html), accessed on 21.10.2021.

4 John Paul II, *Centesimus annus*, § 70.

5 Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti* (On Fraternity and Social Friendship) Vatican website, § 14, (2020), [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html), accessed on 08.10.2021.

Some of the main features of the Indian democratic system are: open elections with an attestation of freedom and rights, people's political participation and justice, inclusivism, no authoritarianism, protection of majority and minority rights,<sup>6</sup> multiculturalism, religious tolerance, the principle of recognition of human dignity which is universal and inviolable<sup>7</sup> and the principle of division of powers. Do these features operate properly? We shall delve into a concrete example to analyse the operation of these democratic features.

## Farmers' Protest

In September 2020 the union government of India passed three laws aimed at liberalisation of the farm sector. Amidst the din of the opposition's demand for further scrutiny and discussion of the bills in the parliament the ruling government hurriedly passed the three laws. The farm bills consist of: 1. The Farmer's Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill. 2. The Farmer's (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill. 3. The Essential Commodities (Amendment Bill).<sup>8</sup> These bills seek to break the monopoly of government regulated *Mandis*<sup>9</sup> and allow farmers to sell directly to private buyers. The farmers oppose these laws because the existing yardstick

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6 Scott Mainwaring, "Transitions to Democracy and Democratic Consolidation: Theoretical and Comparative Issues," [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/248151915\\_Transitions\\_to\\_Democracy\\_and\\_Democratic\\_Consolidation\\_Theoretical\\_and\\_Comparative\\_Issues](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/248151915_Transitions_to_Democracy_and_Democratic_Consolidation_Theoretical_and_Comparative_Issues), accessed on 29.05.2018.

7 Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, „Menschenwürde und Lebensrecht am Anfang und Ende des Lebens: Aufriß der Probleme,“ *Stimmen der Zeit*, no. 4 (2008), 245. This characteristic feature is borrowed from Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde. The dignity of humans should be respected and protected by the government. He writes with regard to the German Constitution (Grundgesetz = GG): „Ausgangspunkt ist Art. 1 Abs 1 GG. Er ist Teil der Verfassung als Rechtsdokument, das einen normativen Geltungsanspruch erhebt, nicht nur ein Ausspruch ohne rechtliche Verbindlichkeit. Er lautet: ‚Die Würde des Menschen ist unantastbar. Sie zu achten und zu schützen ist Verpflichtung aller Staatlichen Gewalt.‘“

8 Cf. India Today, "What is There in Farm Laws that Make Them So Contentious?" <https://www.indiatoday.in/news-analysis/story/what-are-farm-laws-farmers-protest-msp-1749723-2020-12-15>, accessed on 12.11. 2021.

9 *Mandis* are Physical or primary agricultural markets. These are traditional and ubiquitous institutions of economic life. See, Cf. Devesh Kapur and Mekala Krishnamurthy, "Understanding Mandis," *CSI Working Paper Series*, F-35007-INC-1, 2, no. 14-02 (2014), 2.

under state APMC<sup>10</sup> is not mentioned and MSP can be scrapped. If the government does not regulate as middleman, farmers can be forced to sell their products lower than the MSP directly to the corporate buyers. Exploitation is inevitable. If there are problems, the conciliation board will decide the outcome of the disputes and farmers cannot approach civil court. Since November 2020 tens of thousands of farmers have been protesting in nonviolent ways against these laws. Despite several rounds of talks between the government and the farmers union, no consensus has been reached and the stand of the government against revoking these laws remains rigid. The government indirectly favours the corporations. However, new developments are taking place in view of the upcoming assembly polls in the states particularly Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Punjab. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of November 2021 the government announced the repeal of the three farm laws. These laws were convincing for the ruling political party but not for the people.

## Analysis

The farm bills can be approached in two ways: the government claims that very few farmers benefit from *Mandis* and the MSP systems. Therefore, they should be scrapped. On the other hand, dismantling MSP and *Mandis* will only lead to the entry of mighty globalized private traders into farming. In order to increase their profit, these traders will control the product price by fixing a price lower than the just price. The government can strengthen and supervise the procuring systems' operations instead of favouring corporations. As marginal farmers cannot compete with big farm companies, this creates the situation which leads to an economy of exclusion.

Passing the bills without contestation in the parliament, defending the laws with an ulterior motive, and giving closed options to the farmers without repealing the laws all indicate a decay of the features of participation and justice in democracy. Furthermore, the government has used violence against its own farmers by means of police forces, the judiciary, and the media to end their nonviolent protests. When the government tries to rule in a despotic way, people do not enjoy equality, freedom and dignity.

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10 APMC – Agriculture Produce Marketing Committee ensures farmer's products be bought with Minimum Support Price (MSP), a safety net which sustains their economy.



## Problems

The problems can be narrowed down to two interrelated realms: economy and politics. We describe three problems from these interrelated realms: 1) A state-unregulated free market economy would lead to crony capitalism. Crony capitalism aims at maximising profit, excludes the disadvantaged sectors from the economy, and paves the way for ecological devastation and disharmony. 2) A democracy which is bent towards the interests of the oligarchic nexus of political, economic and media elites weakens the participation of people, becomes despotic, and moves toward a *banana republic*.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, the features of democracy degenerate and operate as pseudo-democracy: post-democracy. Collin Crouch describes post-democracy as a “situation when boredom, frustration and disillusion have settled in after a democratic moment; when powerful minority interests have become far more active than the mass of ordinary people in making the political system work for them; where political elites have learned to manage and manipulate popular demands; where people have to be pursued to vote by top-down publicity campaigns.”<sup>12</sup> 3) Neo-populism<sup>13</sup> as a way of exercising political power which polarizes people on cultural and religious grounds, brings down democratic institutions, generates exclusionary ethnic, caste and racial identities, fuels political intolerance and formulates laws for its own convenience. Neo-populism can divert our attention from impending dangers to democracy<sup>14</sup> by delegitimizing the constitutional power relations and appealing to the emotions of the majority community and people who have anti-establishment attitudes to create new relations with power.<sup>15</sup>

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11 Any exploitative government that functions poorly for its citizenry while disproportionately benefiting a corrupt elite group or individual.

12 Colin Crouch, *Post-Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), 19-20.

13 Cf. Rodrigo Guerra Lopez, “Fratelli tutti’ and the challenge of neo-populism,” <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2021-04/fratelli-tutti-and-the-challenge-of-neo-populism.html>, accessed on 08.10.2021. Here the concept of neo-populism indicates a large number of realities of very diverse ideological lineage: Donald Trump, Narendra Modi, Evo Morales, and etc.

14 Kurt Weyland and Raul I. Madrid, (ed.), *When Democracy Trumps Populism: European and Latin American Lessons for the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 152.

15 Cf. Manuel Anselmi, *Populism: An Introduction*, transl. Laura Fano Morissey (New York: Routledge, 2018), 7-8.

## Church's Understanding of Democracy

The Catholic Church respects any form of government, provided it nurtures the common good of the people<sup>16</sup> and relates to the nature of humans. However, the Church values democracy, since this form of governance encourages people to participate and choose their leaders through free and fair elections.<sup>17</sup> The Church views the system of democracy from a larger perspective of ethical, social, and spiritual values. The aim and criteria of political life are comprised of human dignity, respect for persons' rights, and commitment to the common good.<sup>18</sup> While accepting the constitutional state the Church also warns that the mere operation of laws at the procedural and formal level can lead to totalitarianism. Thus, the Church encourages the checks and balances of democracy.<sup>19</sup> Since freedom of persons is important, the religious, cultural, and minority rights of people cannot be sacrificed. Fostering participation through debate and decision making is the foremost duty of political parties. In representative parliamentary democracy citizens participation should be encouraged in matters that directly affect them: "The institution of representation in fact does not exclude the possibility of asking citizens directly about the decisions of great importance for social life."<sup>20</sup>

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16 Paul E. Sigmund, "The Catholic Tradition and Modern Democracy," *The Review of Politics* 49, no. 4 (1987), 530. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1407737>, accessed on 08.10.2021. See CST § 385: The term "a people" does not mean a shapeless multitude, an inert mass to be manipulated and exploited, but a group of persons, each of whom — "at his proper place and in his own way" is able to form its own opinion on public matters and has the freedom to express its own political sentiments and to bring them to bear positively on the common good. Pope Benedict XVI connects the idea of person to ontological ground.

17 CA, § 46. See also Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, § 406, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20060526\\_compendio-dott-soc\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html), accessed on 03.09.2021.

18 Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, § 407. (CST)

19 Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, § 408.409.

20 Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, § 413.

## Church's Moral Evaluation of Democracy

Modern Catholic social teachings offer general principles and avoid concrete recommendations. If it proposes a concrete recommendation, it will then have to rely on a context which can become an issue due to varying circumstances across the world. In this regard Pope Paul VI writes in his apostolic letter *Octogesima adveniens*:

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. Such is not our ambition, nor is it our mission. It is up to the Christian communities to analyse with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel's unalterable words and to draw principles of reflection, norms of judgment and directives for action from the social teaching of the Church.<sup>21</sup>

Despite multiple views within the tradition of the Church, there is common agreement on the importance of guiding principles. Based on her criteria and principles the Church has been evaluating the democratic system in the past few decades. Her moral criteria are: the human person is the aim of every social institution. Ensuring the integral development of humans and the common good; both individual and social welfare, realizing subsidiarity, motivating participation and solidarity which reinforces the less advantaged, an option for the poor, and asserting fundamental values such as truth, freedom, justice, and love.

### Evaluation of Magisterium on Democracy

In the political field, democracy has been redesigned and its ethical basis undermined culturally, ideologically, and philosophically by the political *messianic caudillos*.<sup>22</sup> This has led to the fragmentation of society. The demands of a society should be scrutinized through the lenses of justice and morality. Instead, those

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21 Paul VI, *Octogesima adveniens* (On the Occasion of the Eightieth Anniversary of the Encyclical "Rerum Novarum 1971"), Vatican website, §4, [http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_apl\\_19710514\\_octogesima-adveniens.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-vi_apl_19710514_octogesima-adveniens.html), accessed on 07.08.2021.

22 A Caudillo is a political leader, a dictator or a boss of political territory. He gains power through his charisma and is willing to resort to authoritarianism.

in power meet these demands with electoral and financial power. This creates distrust of the governing bodies and destabilizes democracy.<sup>23</sup> In the economic sphere the state has to guarantee freedom and security with stability of service. However, Pope John Paul II warns: “The absence of stability, together with the corruption of public officials and the spread of improper sources of growing rich and of easy profits deriving from illegal or purely speculative activities, constitutes one of the chief obstacles to development and to the economic order.”<sup>24</sup> Economic development should not leave ethics aside. Would this not infringe upon the rights of individuals?

In *Dialektik der Säkularisierung* Pope Benedict XVI points to the quandary existing in the relationship between right and power in politics. He argues that power should be subordinated to right.<sup>25</sup> Courts must promote justice objectively for everyone. To this end he calls democracy the best order for state and society. However, problems can emerge from the principle of majority. For the sake of votes political authority can be blind to ethics and advocate injustice, a situation in which minority rights can be trampled.<sup>26</sup> Pope Benedict XVI suggests that human rights are incontrovertibly just.<sup>27</sup> In the field of economics, he points to the political irresponsibility in not eliminating the structural causes that hamper agricultural growth in poor countries. This contributes to an ethical deficit in democracy.<sup>28</sup> Following Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI warns of a merely formal democracy. Post-democracy operates at this level thus corrupting democracy. His economic ideas align with the gift model of economy which goes against the dominant model of profit at any cost. He supports a sustainable development that leans towards the local level: “While guaranteeing their sustainability over the

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23 CA, § 47.

24 CA, § 48.

25 Cf. Jürgen Habermas and Joseph Ratzinger, *Dialektik der Säkularisierung: Über Vernunft und Religion* (Freiburg i. Br. et al.: Verlag Herder, 2005), 42. „Konkret ist es die Aufgabe der Politik, Macht unter das Maß des Rechtes zu stellen und so ihren sinnvollen Gebrauch zu ordnen“.

26 Cf. Habermas and Ratzinger, *Dialektik der Säkularisierung*, 43. „Mehrheiten können blind oder ungerecht sein“.

27 Cf. Habermas and Ratzinger, *Dialektik der Säkularisierung*, 40ff.

28 Cf. Habermas and Ratzinger, *Dialektik der Säkularisierung*, 43.

long term as well. All this needs to be accomplished with the involvement of local communities in choices and decisions that affect the use of agricultural land.”<sup>29</sup>

In 2013, Pope Francis issued an Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii gaudium*, in which he decries an economy of exclusion and inequality. In *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis comments on the theme of unprecedented social and environmental upheaval. The economic model driven by a technocratic paradigm is responsible for our current ecological disaster and certainly cannot promise an economy of inclusion. In *Fratelli tutti*, he draws attention to the decadence of democracy due to neo-populism. He says: “Lack of concern for the vulnerable can hide behind a populism that exploits them demagogically for its own purposes, or a liberalism that serves the economic interests of the powerful.”<sup>30</sup> He perceives a strategy that seeks to empty the meaning of words like democracy, freedom, justice, or unity. He writes: “[These words] have been bent and shaped to serve as tools for domination, as meaningless tags that can be used to justify any action.”<sup>31</sup> In sections 154 to 197, he enumerates various issues: Nationalist vision based on religion and culture, polarization in politics, environmental destruction, denial of human rights, oppression of women, throw-away culture, COVID-19, migration disasters, subversion of democratic processes, and religious fundamentalism and fanaticism.

### Towards an Alternative Form of Democracy

The problems mentioned in the farmer’s example: The profit maximising liberalised market economy, post-democracy, and neo-populism all force people into despair and disenchantment. Papal documents identify that these problems play a vital role in the degeneration of the features of democracy. The Church’s critique is not against democracy but rather offers hope to repair and to revive democracy. However, it is not just going back to democracy or moving forward with the altered form of governance but adding new features to the existing one. In the recent past, the Church has taken grassroots perspectives to examine the issues

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29 Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate* (Encyclical on Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth), Vatican website, § 27, 29.06.2009, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20090629\\_caritas-in-veritate.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html), accessed on 05.10.2021.

30 FT, § 155.

31 FT, § 14.

pertaining to democracy. She wishes less powerful groups and the marginalized to also actively take part in the debates and she insists that ecological exploitation must stop. She emphasises that locally oriented economies support the ecosystem. These mandates encourage us to maintain harmony and to place equal importance on economic, social and ecological considerations. While offering us ways to rejuvenate democracy, she also invites us to refurbish it with earth democracy. It is a trajectory towards a fine form of democracy: a Radical Ecological Democracy.<sup>32</sup>

## Radical Ecological Democracy

Radical Ecological Democracy refers to a socio-cultural, moral, spiritual, political and economic arrangement in which individuals and communities have both the right and the full opportunity to participate in decision-making. It is important to define these terms in the contexts of ecological sustainability and equity.<sup>33</sup> Radical Ecological Democracy emerges from the perspectives of the grassroots which envisages a transformation for the future. The central values are equity and justice while taking into consideration the needs of this earth. In this context, individuals can meet their basic needs, be healthy, educated, employed, enjoy an equal social relationship, respect differing cultural identities, and ethically and spiritually embrace a holistic life.<sup>34</sup> Common good is at the centre of governance.

## Proponents of Radical Ecological Democracy

Radical Ecological Democracy is mostly an Indian political perspective. However, it includes the features<sup>35</sup> of the Western radical democracy developed by

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32 When we use the term ‘radical’ ecological democracy, we are not aligning to the leftist notion of radical democracy but we mean entering into the original charisma of democracy with sustainable economy, respecting the worth of earth (*vasudhaiva kutumbakam*), and participating and practising democratic ideals – liberty, equality and fraternity.

33 See Kalpavrikash Environmental Action Group, accessed from: <https://kalpavriksh.org/our-work/alternatives/radical-ecological-democracy/>, accessed on 09.11.2021.

34 Cf. G. Nammazhvar, *Uzhavukkum undu varalaaru – Agriculture has history* (Vikatan Press, 2008), chp. 19, Kindle.

35 The Western notion of radical democracy encourages generative edges and receptive relations in political debates.

Chantal Mouffe, William Connolly, Bonnie Honig, and Jacques Rancière. The features of radical democracy are an inclusive pluralistic notion of political community, universalism of human rights, a challenge to a hegemonic order, and a political change from the Marxian perspective and post-structural thinking. Indian thinkers have developed tendencies towards these features. However, there are specific differences between Indian and Western radical democracy. 1. The Western radical democracy rejects any ontological influence whereas most of the Indian thinkers also include spiritual and metaphysical elements. 2. Although Indian thinkers are influenced by nationalist beliefs they neither sponsor Hindutva nationalism nor secular nationalism. 3. The caste system is specific to the Indian context and most of the thinkers have fought against it. 4. Indian thinkers take a grassroots approach. Radical Ecological Democracy adapts these features and modifies some of them. It considers the disadvantaged, the poor, and the marginalized in a humanistic nationalism.<sup>36</sup> This approach includes features such as eco-sustainability and equity, harmonious living with diverse creatures on earth, a sustainable economy of self-reliance (*swaraj*) at the local level, non-violence, cherishing the interconnectedness of living beings and non-living things, and humans taking responsibility towards non-humans. Because of our capability for moral responsibility, we respect and recognize all non-human beings for their own proper inherent value. The proponents of RED are Ashish Kotari, Vandana Shiva, J. C. Kumarappa, and G. Nammazhvar. The first two follow the organic farming methods of Nammazhvar. We will briefly explore Nammazhvar's ideas to bring out the features of RED.

### Nammazhvar's Earth Democracy

Nammazhvar was born in Thanjavur in Tamilnadu in 1938 and died in 2014. He was an organic scientist and an expert in organic farming. Nammazhvar's philosophy can be expressed as organic farming as a way of life. He was influenced by the ideas of Paulo Freire, Vinobha Bhave, M. K. Gandhi, and J. C. Kumarappa and believed in participatory development and participatory education.<sup>37</sup> He spent his life mostly with the rural poor and concentrated on their economic develop-

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36 Cf. Felix Wilfred, *The Sling of Utopia* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005), 105-106.

37 Cf. G. Nammazhvar, *Uzhavukku undu varalaaru – Agriculture has History*, chp. 18, Kindle.

ment. In the process of learning from farmers and teaching them modern appropriate technology, he proposed to rural workers a model of a household, nature based sustainable economy.

He developed his thoughts from Thiruvalluvar, the great scholar and poet from Tamilnadu, India, who lived in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE and advocated a household, nature based and sustainable economy. For Thiruvalluvar *aram* (ethics), *porul* (economics), *inbam* (happiness) and *veedu* (Moksha/ salvation) are inter-connected. In his system of thinking, God, religion, ethics, and economy are inseparable. His thoughts are holistic, in that we decipher in them a sustainable interwoven economic understanding. Immediately after a couplet on deity he reflects on rain. Rains bestow elemental assistance to lives on earth. Therefore, first material existence, its riches and prosperity are important. Ethics, good life and ordered life are impossible without rain.

“தப்பார்க்கத் தப்பாய தப்பாக்கித் தப்பார்க்கத்  
தப்பாய துடி மழை”

(“*Thupparkkuth Thuppaaya Thuppaakkith Thuppaarkkuth  
Thuppaaya Thoovu Mazhai*”)

“The rain makes pleasant food for eaters rise; As food itself, thirst-quenching draught supplies.”<sup>38</sup> The rain begets the food and drink we consume. Water gives life and hence one’s spirit. Nammazhvar takes this idea of nature-based economy seriously and blends these considerations with the appropriate usage of technology.

Nammazhvar’s organic farm promotes the wellbeing of biodiversity, an interconnected living of all beings. There are innumerable microorganisms under the soil which help plants to produce healthy food. Healthy food promotes life.<sup>39</sup> In this regard Nammazhvar says: “அடி காட்டிற்கு, நட, மாட்டிற்கு, நனி வீட்டிற்கு.” (“*Adi kaattirkku, nadu maattirkku, nuni veettirkku*”) which means

38 Thiruvalluvar, *Thirukkural in Ancient Scripts*, ed. S. Govindaraju and M. Chandrasekaran. (Tambaram: Madras Christian College, 1980), 12.

39 Thiruvalluvar, *Thirukkural in Ancient Scripts*, 108.



the roots of plants belong to organisms under soil and forests, the middle of plants belongs to animals and the tip of plants belong to humans.<sup>40</sup> The resources of the earth are shared by everybody.

Nature sustains all living beings and non-living things. Our ecosystem accommodates these diverse beings together and makes them dependent on one another. As rational and moral agents we are responsible for organic and non-organic beings. The dominant economy, which ignores ethics, has only looked for huge profits. Captivated by the liberal market economy the government promotes ‘agribusiness’ contracting with global multinational companies<sup>41</sup> which are import – export oriented. They promote chemical pesticides<sup>42</sup> and fertilizers which are poisonous and damage the producers, soil, and consumers.<sup>43</sup> They scientifically spread unscientific truths with the help of media. When Nammazhvar wanted to promote organic farming and stem the destruction of agricultural fields due to hydrocarbon projects, he was suppressed. This suppression leads to epistemic<sup>44</sup> and social injustice as the purpose of elites is to make exorbitant profit for themselves.

Nammazhvar takes up the idea of Gandhi’s *swaraj* (self-reliance, self-rule) and implements it at the local level. A farmer knows his farming methods and he should be motivated with sustainable methods.<sup>45</sup> This also includes the use of appropriate technology but not a complete paradigm shift to modern technology. Appropriate technology will enhance both rural social equity and standard of liv-

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40 Eg., From a maize plant humans take the ear of the corn, cows and animals take leaves and stalk of the plant and the soil and the living organisms underneath earth take the roots of the plant.

41 In his book *Uzhavukku undu varalaaru* (Agriculture has History) he refers to the MNCs Rockefeller and Ford companies, their relation to C. Subramanian the then agricultural minister. Cf. G. Nammazhvar, *Uzhavukku undu varalaaru – Agriculture has History*, chps. 19–20, Kindle.

42 Cf. G. Nammazhvar, *Naan Nammahvar Pesugiren – I Nammazhvar Speak* (Chennai: Vikatan Press, 2014), chp. 31, Kindle. Nammazhvar says that on the seashore plants do not grow because of the dense salt content in the soil. Similarly, the poisonous pesticides such as Ammonium sulphate, urea, calcium nitrate, potassium, and di ammonium Phosphate kill the organisms in the soil and make the land barren.

43 Nammazhvar, *Naan Nammahvar Pesugiren*, chp. 21, Kindle. In connection with the Green revolution, Nammazhvar claims that it has destroyed food, farm, ethics, economy, and happiness of people.

44 Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power & the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1. Fricker characterizes epistemic injustice as “a wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower.”

45 G. Nammazhvar, *Uzhavukku undu varalaaru – Agriculture has History*, chps. 16-17, Kindle.

ing. Nevertheless, the despotic dictatorship and liberalising market economy in our time have taken a direction contrary to Gandhian *swaraj*. The central government exercises power and promotes the wellbeing of powerful economic elites. Gandhian *swaraj* calls for decentralization of power. Under this system, farmers can think, participate in discussions, and be involved in decision making.<sup>46</sup> Meaningful living needs moral and spiritual values. Deceiving people with superstitious religious beliefs can only generate violence, a trend evident in today's polarised politics. In Nammazhvar's ideas we can discern the features of RED.

### Features of Radical Ecological Democracy

We have found these features in the writings of Nammazhvar, Kotari, Shiva and Gandhi.

1) Eco-sustainability and equity: Our eco-system operates within a web of biodiversity. Maintenance of biological diversity balances the ecological system. Causing harm to them will only result in causing harm to our progeny. Current scientific data indicate that we have already exceeded the limits of eco-sustainability. Social equity defines the decision-making arenas for all citizens, equal opportunities, fair distribution of wealth, and the preservation of diverse cultures should be extended to all.

2) Diversity: The Upanishads say: "For those who live magnanimously the entire world constitutes but a family."<sup>47</sup> This verse expresses the idea of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*. In sanskrit *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* (वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्) means "earth is one family". *Vasuda* means "earth", *iva* means "is", and *kutumbakam* means "family". Diversity as *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* means diversity of life is not limited only to humans but extends also to other forms of life. Around 6 BCE a *Tamil Sangam* philosopher Kaniyan Poongundranaar says "யாதும் ஊரே யாவரும் கேளிர்"<sup>48</sup> (*Yaathum oore yaavarum keelir*) (All cities and towns

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46 The 73rd and 74th amendments of the Indian constitution are concerned with localization and indicate a more direct democracy at the local level. See the Constitution of India.

47 "Maha Upanishad," ch. vi, v71-73, <https://www.astrojyoti.com/mahaupanishad-7.htm>, accessed on 02.08.2021.

48 C. Balasubramanian cites Kaniyan Poongundranaar's song *Puranaanooru*, § 192,. See. C. Balasubramanian, *Vazhviai nerigal – Ethics for life* (Chennai: Narumalar Padhippagam, 1990), 21.

belong to everyone and we are kith and kin). Another verse is *Sarva Loka Hitam* which means “wellbeing of all”.

3) *Swaraj* means self-rule or self-reliance.<sup>49</sup> The Gandhian concept of *swaraj* is based on the philosophy of *advaita* which means “‘not two’ but ‘one’”. Etymologically it is an order of self *sva* or truth that you and I are not different but one.<sup>50</sup> *Swaraj* also means having no discrimination of race and religion.<sup>51</sup> *Swaraj* does not mean rule by the majority community, the Hindus. Gandhi writes: “*Swaraj* is the rule of all people, is the rule of justice”<sup>52</sup> and can be achieved only through truth and nonviolence.<sup>53</sup> *Swaraj* as Radical Ecological Democracy is based on individuals acting freely and ethically<sup>54</sup> in a collective context and blends the spiritual, economic, ethical, social, and political spheres into a network that encompasses us.

4) Interconnectedness: It is about thinking and acting in networks and systemic relationships and considering the complex web of relatedness between the areas of social issues, ecology and economy. This feature of RED is similar to the principle of *retinity* developed by Markus Vogt. *Retinity* is “Thinking and acting in networks and systemic relationships.”<sup>55</sup> This principle is well explained in German: „*Retinität ,Gesamtvernetzung‘ ist das Schlüsselprinzip der Umweltethik im Anspruch der Nachhaltigkeit. Es fordert, die soziale und ökonomische Entwicklung so auszugestalten, dass das Netzwerk der sie tragenden ökologischen Regelkreise erhalten bleibt.*“<sup>56</sup> It is a circular and cross-linked thinking and action in the socio-economic-ecological context. *Brihadāranyaka Upanisad* verse 1.4.14.

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49 Cf. Rudrangshu Mukherjee, “Gandhi’s *Swaraj*,” *Economic and Political Weekly* XLIV, no. 50 (2009), 35.

50 Cf. Bidyut Chakrabarty Rajendra Kumar Pandey, *Modern Indian Political Thought: Text and Context* (New Delhi: Sage Publications Inc., 2009), 55.

51 M. K. Gandhi, *Young India*, 1-5-1930, p. 149.

52 M. K. Gandhi, *Young India*, 16-4-1931, p. 78.

53 M. K. Gandhi, *Harijan*, 18-1-1942, p. 4.

54 Ethical criteria are human dignity, common good, subsidiarity, solidarity, sustainability and the option for the victims and the poor.

55 Markus Vogt, K. Ritson and J Blanc, “Sustainability and Climate Justice from a Theological Perspective,” *RCC Perspectives*, no. 3, 2010, Doi.org/10.5282/rcc/5566, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26240260>, 3, accessed on 24.08.2019.

56 Markus Vogt, „Natürliche Ressourcen und intergenerationelle Gerechtigkeit,“ in *Christliche Sozialethik: Ein Lehrbuch*, ed. Marianne Heimbach-Steins, vol. 2 (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2005), 141.

says: “May all be prosperous and happy, May all be free from illness, may all see what is spiritually uplifting, may no one suffer. Om peace, peace, peace.”<sup>57</sup>

5) Responsibility: We have responsibility towards the earth and towards all living beings and non-living things. The ideas of Martin Lintner and Eberhard Schockenhoff illuminate this feature of Radical Ecological Democracy. Lintner calls it *Verantwortung* (responsibility) and he claims that humans should have a responsibility to protect domestic and wild animals, as they share their habitat with them, and that they should never treat an animal merely as a means to an end, but always with respect while at the same time recognizing its species-specific needs as well as its sensitive, emotional, and cognitive capabilities.<sup>58</sup> Schockenhoff states that humans have a special position among creation and although being granted special rights, special duties vis-à-vis nature are required. Humans can assume responsibility for themselves and for nature, by orienting their way of life and actions towards the moral standards of good and evil.<sup>59</sup> Radical Ecological Democracy is not restricted to humans but extends to all created realities<sup>60</sup> which include the entire ecosystem; thus, humans cannot exploit the earth. We are responsible to protect and preserve living organisms and non-living beings.

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57 In sanskrit: । ॐ सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनिः सर्वे सन्तु नरिमयाः सर्वे भद्राणि पिशयन्तु। मा कश्चित् दुःखं भागभवेत्॥ ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥ See *The Brihadāranyaka Upanisad: With a Commentary of Sankaracarya*, trans. Swami Madhavananda (Kolkata: Advaita Ashram Kolkata, 2018), v. 1.4.14.

58 Cf. Lintner, *Der Mensch und das liebe Vieh: Ethische Fragen im Umgang mit Tieren*, 41. See also Martin M. Lintner, “Respect for the Proper Value of Each Creature: An Animal-Ethical Re-thinking of the Encyclical *Laudato si’*,” *Louvain Studies*, 43 (2020), 44.

59 Cf. Eberhard Schockenhoff, *Ethik des Lebens: Grundlage und neue Herausforderungen* (Freiburg i. Br. et al.: Verlag Herder, 2009), 123.

60 Only rational subjects, people, can be the agents of democracy. However, the democratic process has to include the interests of all living beings and only living beings have interests. Animals have interests but they cannot be included into democratic discourses. Therefore, as rational subjects we have to imagine their interests and protect them. Non-organic beings, though they have no interests, still they influence our lives. Therefore, we also have to include the protection of non-organic beings in our responsibility. In this way democracy extends also to the created realities.

## Conclusion: The Church's Trajectory Towards a Radical Ecological Democracy

The features of radical ecological democracy fit very well with the Church's idea of the form of governance. The Church advocates an inclusive pluralistic community, protection of human rights, challenges to an unjust dominant system. She encourages dialogical generative edges and receptive relations in political debates. She urges to integrate eco-sustainability with social equity, diversity, a balance between local and global economy with decentralization of power functioning, interconnectedness (*retinity*), and responsibility towards organisms and non-living things. All these features are fulfilled by Radical Ecological Democracy.

We do not mean that the Church's evaluation of the present form of governance is aimed at eliminating democracy but rather her analysis seeks to strengthen a special kind of democracy. As she criticizes the present system she calls for an infusion of grace and a transformation of our worldviews, personal lifestyles, and social and economic policies. These transformations imply spiritual change, a radical conversion from excessive individualism to solidarity and communion. The Church thinks of a politics of fraternity instead of polarized neo-populist trends. She envisages a moral recovery from a profit-maximising-oriented economy to an inclusive creation-centred sustainable economy, a reaffirmation of the moral stand of the responsibility to regulate the economy. She strongly recommends an authentic conversion from exploiting natural resources to the respect of nature as an ecological system. This conversion will motivate us to embrace a sense of wholeness and deep communion with this ecological system where everything is connected. The hope of the Church is a movement towards Radical Ecological Democracy.

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# People of God and People of the State: A Critique of the Role of the Church in Democracy in Nigeria in the Light of Ecclesia in Africa

*Mordi Victor Chukwudobe*

## **Abstract:**

Democracy has been a challenging enterprise for Nigeria since its return, after years of Military rule. The Nigerian Political Class has not delivered the promised gains that citizens have paid for with their votes in the ballot box. As an important stakeholder in the Nigerian State, the Church has a role to play in influencing the direction of the democratic conversation in Nigeria. This work seeks to evaluate how the Church has fared so far in its role, in the light of the ecclesiological principle of “Church as family” of the African Synod.

Nigeria’s experience with democracy has been a very challenging and sometimes tumultuous one. Since independence from the British in 1960 this supposed “best system of government” has not given Nigerians the expected national progress and a collective sense of nationhood. Occasionally interrupted by military coups marred by rigged, inconclusive, and sometimes cancelled elections practiced mostly within deeply antagonistic ethnic, religious, and group motivations, democracy in Nigeria has been everything but “smooth-sailing”. Seemingly compounding also, is the very pluralistic constitution of the nation itself. As the most populous African State, Nigeria has a population of approximately 212 million,<sup>1</sup> and over 250 ethno-linguistic groups with an almost corresponding number of languages. The resultant effect of these developments is a nation torn by deep-seated mistrust at all levels of national life. Many politicians have seized this opportunity to plunder the Nigerian commonwealth and further impoverish already traumatised people. According to a World Bank report, “around 4 in 10 Nigerians in 2018 were living in poverty and millions more were vulnerable to falling below the poverty line, as economic growth was slow and was not inclusive.”<sup>2</sup> The security implications of this challenge leave no fine words. This scenario provides ready

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1 Cf. <https://data.un.org/en/iso/ng.html>, accessed on 21.11.2021.

2 World Bank Report, *Poverty and Equity Brief, African Western and Central: Nigeria, October 2021*, [https://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/poverty/987B9C90-CB9F4D93-AE8C-750588BF00QA/AM2021/Global\\_POVEQ\\_NGA.pdf](https://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/poverty/987B9C90-CB9F4D93-AE8C-750588BF00QA/AM2021/Global_POVEQ_NGA.pdf), accessed on 21.11.2021.

tools for terrorist groups targeting young people who have no jobs. Security in Nigeria is currently at an all-time low as lives and property continue to be lost daily through deliberate terrorist acts, ethnic and religious persecutions, armed robbery, kidnapping and domestic violence.

Another major player in the composition of the Nigerian State are the religious institutions which constitute the widest and deepest expressions of popular participation in Nigeria. Besides Islam and Christianity, syncretism among local and world religions is common. Nigeria's population size, ethnic diversity, and deepening sense of insecurity – political, economic, cultural, social and health – combine to create a collective experience of anxiety which, in turn, generates a spiralling need for religious associations, services, rituals, and solutions. Population growth, competitions, and the multiple services provided by religious communities make religious associations a significant component of the Nigerian social structure. This also makes Religious Institutions a very important recourse and resource for politicians vying for political office at different levels. The average religious Nigerian listens and mostly adheres to what religious leaders say and follows where the believing community goes. This factor has contributed to giving elections and other aspects of the democratic process religious colourings in many instances in Nigeria.

It is in this vein that this work seeks to take a critical look at the role that the Catholic Church has played in the democratic life of Nigeria. What has the Church done right? What has the Church not done well? What can the Church do better? These questions will be gleaned through the teachings of the Post-Synodal Apostolic exhortation "Ecclesia in Africa" of Pope John Paul II which was the first of its kind to directly address certain issues and challenges facing the Church in Africa and the societies in which the Church is called to evangelise. The designations "People of God" and "People of the State" as used in this work basically refer to the same group of people.

## The People of God and State

The People of God is a designation used by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council to refer to the Church as a whole. It is used in the second Chapter of the

Dogmatic Constitution on The Church, *Lumen Gentium*, with the intention to first establish the unity of the whole Church before all hierarchical differences.<sup>3</sup> It is also worth noting that the designation is a biblical concept. According to Vornier “the term People of God is not just frequent in Christian literature but primarily scriptural. It is used in the New Testament; it is used as frequently as the word ‘Church’ and fills every page of the Old Testament.”<sup>4</sup> It is in the same sense that this designation is used in this work. All who constitute the Church (in this context, the Catholic Church) are those referred to here – the clergy, the religious and all the lay faithful.

The term “The State” has been defined differently depending on the context in which it is being used. Whether it is sociological or legal, purely political, or cultural, economic, or otherwise, the definitions of the State abound. Raghuram G. Rajan broadly refers to the State as the political governance structure of a country, the federal government which includes the executive, legislative, and judiciary.<sup>5</sup> The focus here, however, is not the state in the sense of this definition but the People of the State. In other words, it is not strictly the members of the executive, legislative and judicial arms of the federal government but the citizens of the State being referred to in this work. Those who vote for those who eventually occupy political positions of responsibility are being designated here as the People of the State. It is worth noting that those who constitute the People of God also constitute the People of the State. This means that those who are citizens who vote and are the majority in the democratic process are also members of the Church. They are the major stakeholders in the democratic conversation, especially if we hold that the government is elected by the people, and that power which is exercised by the State (executive, legislative and judiciary) is given by the people. This even increases the onus of responsibility on the People of the State (many of whom are also members of the Church) to ensure that democracy in Nigeria works. So, we are back to the question of how the Church as a community within a state has fared in her role in democracy in Nigeria.

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3 Cf. A. Grillmeier, “The People of God,” in *Commentary on The Documents of Vatican II*, Vol. 1, ed. H. Vorgrimler (New York, Herder and Herder), 153.

4 A. Vornier, *The Collected Works of Abbot Vornier II*, (London: Burns & Oates, 1952), 137.

5 G. R. Raghuram, *The Third Pillar: How Markets and The State Leave the Community Behind*, (USA: Penguin Books), 2019.

## Ecclesia in Africa: Theology and Message

Before this document is treated, it is important to trace how its birth became pertinent. At Vatican II, Africa played a very minimal role if any at all. The presence of Africa at Vatican II was marginal and mostly by proxy. An examination of the sixteen documents show that the Council was largely a forum for the concerns of the Churches of Europe and America in the 1960s. Africa's problems and pre-occupations, therefore, only came indirectly: they did not determine the central perspective from which the Council's deliberations were moving. Moreover, real acquaintance with the documents must not be exaggerated, even though efforts were made to publish them and widely diffuse their message in the African continent.<sup>6</sup> There was also the issue of the theological unpreparedness of the African representatives regarding the theological themes discussed at the Council. This unpreparedness could be traced to certain factors: the Church in Africa at that time could hardly be described as African as most of the bishops were still not African-born. The Church in Africa was more of an outpost of a very Eurocentric ecclesial body and the representatives were more of a voting bloc while theological and ideological debates unfolded. Also, the lack of a rich pool of African theologians at that time meant that the corps of the *Periti* were entirely or exclusively European and North American. Therefore, the concerns of the universal church as outlined and debated at the council barely intersected with the pressing issues that the "young" churches in places like Africa had to contend with.<sup>7</sup> Despite the limited role Africa played at the council, one could argue that the council provided an intrinsic potential for the African Church. As Orobator would suggest, "Vatican II occurred at a momentous time in the history of Africa when nationalist tumult and agitation slowly and intensely rose to a combustible crescendo. During the conciliar years, that movement would culminate in precipitated transfer of political power from bewildered and beleaguered colonialists to exuberant and

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6 Cf. P. A. Kalilombe, "The Effect of the Council on World Catholicism: Africa," *Modern Catholicism: Vatican II and After*, edited by Hastings, A. (London, SPCK, 1991), 310 – 311. See also Denis, P. "Historical Significance of Hurley's Contribution," *Vatican II: Keeping the Dream Alive*, edited by D. Hurley, (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2005), 197–98.

7 Cf. J. W. O'Malley, *What Happened At Vatican II*, (Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 2008), 291-295. See also A. Hastings, "The Council Came to Africa," *Vatican II: By Those Who Were There*, London, edited by A. Stacpoole, ed. (Geoffrey Chapman, 1986) 316.

inexperienced African leaders. Thus, the religious excitement occasioned by the sudden announcement and convocation of the council coincided with the secular excitement over Africa's political emancipation. Symbolically, Pope John XXIII's radical objective of *aggiornamento* bore notable resemblance to aspirations for political independence in several African countries in the 1960s."<sup>8</sup>

It was therefore no surprise that, as the Church in Africa became increasingly indigenous, there were calls to address issues that bear directly on the African continent. There was a resolution by African bishops to build a continental structure to bring forth the African vision to the whole Church. The Synod of African Bishops is a child of this call. In July 1969, during his visit to Uganda – the first of a Pope to Africa in modern times, Paul VI officially launched the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM).<sup>9</sup> This body would be the major forum where the need for an African Synod was amplified. On 6 January, 1989, Pope John Paul II announced the convocation of the first African Synod and inaugurated the Synod on April 10, 1994, with a holy mass in Rome. The Synod also closed with a Mass at Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome on May 7, 1994. The Pope would later present the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation titled "*Ecclesia in Africa*" between September 14 and 20, 1995.<sup>10</sup>

Although this document deals largely with themes on Evangelisation, it contains messages that also speak to democracy and the mission of the Church to engage in the democratic process. Idara Otu also notes that the historical context of that time was such that many African countries were facing political upheavals, military coups, and a very grim future. Thus, the Church in Africa remained an unwavering voice calling for social change and democratic governance.<sup>11</sup>

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8 A. E. Orobator, "After All, Africa is Largely a Nonliterate Continent: The Reception of Vatican II in Africa." *Marquette University journal Theological Studies*, Vol. 74. No. 2. (2013), 285.

9 Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM): History. <https://amecea.org/secam-map/> Accessed on 21.11.2021.

10 Agenzia Fides (Information Service of The Pontifical Mission Societies). VATICAN – The First Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops. [http://www.fides.org/en/news/30329-VATICAN\\_The\\_First\\_Special\\_Assembly\\_for\\_Africa\\_of\\_the\\_Synod\\_of\\_Bishops\\_file](http://www.fides.org/en/news/30329-VATICAN_The_First_Special_Assembly_for_Africa_of_the_Synod_of_Bishops_file), Accessed on 21.11.2021.

11 Cf. I. Otu, *Communion Ecclesiology and Social Transformation in African Catholicism, Between Vatican II and African Synod II*. (Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2020), 107.

## Theology of The Church as a Family

The concept of Family was used as a central theme by the synod fathers. According to Obiezu, this definition of the Church is “distinctively African, yet scriptural and faithful to the traditions of the Church.”<sup>12</sup> Family is central to the African anthropological worldview and one of the themes in the life-concept of African clan society.<sup>13</sup> The document follows this tune noting that “In African culture and tradition the role of the family is everywhere held to be fundamental.”<sup>14</sup> This idea is also echoed by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria on the homepage of its website stating: “The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, CBCN, is the organ of unity, communion and solidarity for the millions of Catholics spread across the thirty-six states of Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory. It is the forum wherein the collegiality of the Nigeria Catholic bishops, as successors of the Apostles in union with the Pope, is expressed and where the idea of the Church as family is signified.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, the synod acknowledges the central and mutual components in the African concept of Family in relation to the Church as well as its potential effectiveness in addressing the challenges of the Church’s mission in Africa. As Pope John Paul II states:

Not only did the Synod speak of inculturation, but it also made use of it, taking the Church as God’s Family as its guiding idea for the evangelization of Africa. The Synod Fathers acknowledged it as an expression of the Church’s nature particularly appropriate for Africa. For this image emphasizes care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust. The new evangelization will thus aim at building up the Church as Family, avoiding all ethnocentrism and excessive particularism, trying instead to encourage reconciliation and true communion between different ethnic groups, favouring solidarity and the sharing of personnel and resources among

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12 Obiezu, E.X. (2011). The Church in Africa and The Search for Integral and Sustainable Development of Africa: Toward A Socio-Economic and Politically Responsive Church. In Ilo, S.C., Ogbonnaya, J., Ojacor, A. eds *The Church As Salt and Light: Path To an African Ecclesiology of Abundant Life*. Oregon, Pickwick Publishers. 46.

13 Cf. B. Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications, 1992), 17.

14 John Paul II, Pope, *Ecclesia In Africa*. [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_14091995\\_ecclesia-in-africa.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_14091995_ecclesia-in-africa.html) Accessed on 21.11.2021.

15 See <https://www.cbcn-ng.org> for about The CBCN. Accessed on 21.11.2021.

the particular Churches, without undue ethnic considerations. It is earnestly to be hoped that theologians in Africa will work out the theology of the Church as Family with all the riches contained in this concept, showing its complementarity with other images of the Church.

The patristic writings also employed this biblical metaphor of the Church as “Family of God” to express ecclesial communion and fraternity. In their mostly pastoral writings, Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, John Chrysostom, Tertullian, Cyprian of Carthage, and Augustine all used this image to teach and explain certain aspects of the Church including catholicity, unity and the Church’s mystical nature.<sup>16</sup>

As noted earlier in this work, Vatican II identified the Church as the People of God which also translates into the Family of God. The Fathers deliberately begin this discussion from scripture. This is also given the fact that the whole goal of Vatican II was to re-root the teachings of the Church back in Scripture; to go back to the source (ressourcement). So, beginning with the chosen people of Israel in the Old Testament, the Fathers trace the historical development of this designation of People of God within Scripture.<sup>17</sup> God first chose the people of Israel and established a covenant with them through Abraham, making them a holy people. They were to be God’s own ‘special’ people, apart from other nations around them, thereby giving the notion of election. All this was a way of preparation for the new covenant to be ratified by Christ Jesus.<sup>18</sup> The Fathers of Vatican II describe the family as a Church and the Church as a family. The Council states that, “from the wedlock of Christians there comes the family, in which new citizens of human society are born, who by the grace of the Holy Spirit received in baptism are made children of God, thus perpetuating the people of God through the centuries. The family is, so to speak, the domestic church. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children; they should encourage

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16 Idara Otu does a concise and good presentation of the main points in the second chapter of his book. See Otu, *Communion Ecclesiology and Social Transformation in African Catholicism*, 119-122.

17 Cf. M. Lavin, *Vatican II: Fifty Years of Evolution and Revolution In The Catholic Church* (Mumbai: St Pauls Publications, 2012), 37.

18 Grillmeier, “The People of God,” 153.

them in the vocation which is proper to each of them, fostering with special care vocation to a sacred state” (LG 11). The Family is established by God and ordered for the good of the partners and children (cf. GS 48). It is a place where generations come to help each other grow in wisdom (cf. GS 52). *Lumen Gentium* gives various descriptions of the Church as God’s Family stating that, “On this foundation the Church is built by the apostles, and from it the Church receives durability and consolidation. This edifice has many names to describe it: the house of God in which dwells His family; the household of God in the Spirit; the dwelling place of God among men; and, especially, the holy temple” (LG 6). This same definition is also employed by Paul VI, in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, noting that the family is supposed to be “a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates” (EN 71). John Paul II would similarly describe the Church as such in his apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* stating that the family is a place where people can experience “a specific revelation and realisation of ecclesial communion” (FC 20).

Foundational to this theology of the Church as Family are the Trinity and the incarnation of Christ. Idara Otu describes the Trinity as the quintessential model par excellence and the orienting point of the Church as Family of God. It is the central mystery of faith and the fundamental creed in the hierarchy of catholic doctrines.<sup>19</sup> The Council Fathers of Vatican II, in the first chapter of the dogmatic constitution on the Church, state that the Church is “a people made one by the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (LG 4). Instituted as a free act of grace from on high by God the Father, the Church is instituted on earth by Christ who transforms the calamitous act of Adam for mankind into salvation. The Holy Spirit which proceeds from the Father and the Son would then perfect this salvific work.<sup>20</sup> We are children of God the Father, brothers and sisters of God the son, and this bond of love is facilitated by the Holy Spirit. In the incarnation, God chooses to share in our human family. The Council Fathers describe the Church as the sacrament of Christ; a Christocentric idea of the Church which can only be understood in relation to Christ as a mystery. According to Kloppenburg, if the Church

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19 Cf. Otu, *Communion Ecclesiology and Social Transformation in African Catholicism*, 133.

20 Cf. Grillmeier, “The People of God,” 141-142.



is separated from Christ, it ceases to be a mystery.<sup>21</sup> Taken from Scriptures, this word (mystery) suitably describes the Church like the holy human nature of Christ in its external visibility which both conceals and reveals the inner divine reality.<sup>22</sup> This is equivalent to the meaning of sacrament. Summing it up, the Synodal exhortation states that “the Word, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Only Son of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary and was made man. This is the sublime mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, a mystery which took place in history: in clearly defined circumstances of time and space, amidst a people with its own culture, a people that God had chosen and accompanied throughout the entire history of salvation, in order to show through what he did for them what he intended to do for the whole human race” (EA 60).

The message of the Synod can be summarily highlighted thus:

- The Church cannot engage in a democratic society without a clear ecclesiological identity.
- This identity has to be situated within the context of the culture and realities in which it is called to evangelise.
- Every member of the “People of God” has a role to play in this engagement.
- Inculturation, dialogue, social action, and practical witnessing are essential tools for the realisation of this engagement.
- The Church must maintain the option for the poor.

## A Critique of the Role of the Church in Democracy in Nigeria

The Church in Nigeria should be willing and ready to embrace the responsibility and task of influencing and helping to shape the democratic conversation in the Nigerian State. There does not seem to be any other option, as the wellbeing of her members depends on the outcomes of the Nigerian democratic enterprise. It is part of the Church’s evangelising mission. The document *Ecclesia in Africa*

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21 B. Kloppenburg, *Ecclesiology of Vatican II*. (Chicago, Franciscan Herald Press, 1974), 19-20.

22 B. Kloppenburg, *Ecclesiology of Vatican II*. (Chicago, Franciscan Herald Press, 1974), 19-20.

states, “the development of every person and of the whole person, especially of the poorest and most neglected in the community – is at the very heart of evangelization. Between evangelisation and human advancement – development and liberation – there are in fact profound links. These include links of an anthropological order, because the man who is to be evangelized is not an abstract being but is subject to social and economic questions. They also include links in the theological order since one cannot dissociate the plan of creation from the plan of Redemption. The latter plan touches the very concrete situations of injustice to be combatted and of justice to be restored” (EA 68). So far, the Church in Nigeria has made progress in certain areas but there are certain actions that can be taken to better what is being done.

### Electoral Education, Sensitisation, and Observation

The Church in Nigeria through the Justice, Development, Peace and Caritas (JDPC) department of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference, as well as the different dioceses, have been in the forefront of educating Catholics and other Nigerians on their democratic and civic responsibilities, especially during election periods. Seminars, workshops, and Symposia have helped many to be actively involved in the electoral process. Debates and townhalls have also been organised between political candidates to help the electorate make better and more informed choices when they go to the ballot box. This has, in no small way, helped because many Catholics have earlier been quite uninterested when elections were approaching. There has also been an active effort by the Church in partnership with international bodies to observe and report elections. This effort is geared towards ensuring that irregularities and rigging are checked and that votes count. It has also been a way of engaging young people – Christians and Muslims alike – in the electoral process. They can see first-hand how elections happen and know that they have a role to play in the destiny of a nation that belongs to them.

### The Catholic Bishops’ Conference as a Gadfly

Through the communiques at the end of every plenary, the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria have always encouraged just leadership and accountable stewardship from the political class. They have also not failed to speak out against the corruption and irresponsibility that has been the bane of the Nigerian political class for

a very long time. The bishops have always called on the citizenry to hold political leaders accountable as their leadership and decisions will affect the lives of the people.

With the growing insecurity and poverty in the country, the bishops have organised and taken part in peaceful protests to sting the government to action as well as Rosary processions to pray for the soul of the Nigerian nation. Even at diocesan levels, the bishops have not been silent in the face of a decaying political class whose actions and inactions have negatively affected the Nigerian State. In addition, the bishops have had audiences with the executive and legislative arms of the government at different times to have discussions on how to move the nation forward and relay the concerns, fears, and pains of the Nigerian people. This is an important step towards bridging the salient gap between the State and the people of the State.

In a political environment painted with the colour of strife and animosity, the bishops have at individual and collective levels, championed the cause of reconciliation between warring parties and even political candidates. This also extends to communal conflicts with the potential to create insecurity, destruction of lives and property, as well as economic hardship. Despite these and other efforts of the Church, it is the conviction of this work that more can still be done by the Church.

### **Some Self-examination Is Needed**

As a community of humans, the church is not exempt from the inclinations and failings of human societies. Therefore, the Church in Nigeria should have the ability for self-reflection and criticism. There are certainly situations in dioceses and Parishes where members of the Church have been influenced by the political atmosphere of negativity in the country. Factions loyal to different political parties and candidates have carried their baggage into the Church community thereby creating conflict and rancour. There have also been situations of violent clashes in dioceses as a result of appointments within the Church to pastoral and ecclesiastical positions. Clergymen have been seen to openly support and even campaign for certain political candidates, thereby evoking some strife within the parish communities they have been appointed to pastor. If we cannot put our family of God's people in order, how can we positively influence the political situation of our nation? What has happened to the slogan, "Practice what you preach"?

## More Action and Less Words

As much as the communiques of the bishops' conference is a laudable effort, it should not stop at it being read to parishioners during mass or published in parish bulletins or on parish websites. Efforts should be made to put these words into organised, peaceful but effective action. What this entails is that the bishops can also be more prophetic in their pronouncements and admonitions. There have been criticisms from various quarters that the language of the Communiques is mostly bland. It is seen as the "usual stuff" that the bishops write twice every year, doing very little to inspire Catholics to action.

The activities of the JDPCs have mostly been providing relief materials, sourcing for funds to observe elections, writing reports to donor agencies and some level of training of priests, religious and other staff. This trend has been overtaken by many civil society organisations (CSO), relegating this aspect of the Church's evangelising mission. What happened to active advocacy? What has happened to scientific socio-political and economic analysis based on data gathering to enable proper engagement in the democratic conversation? The tools for engagement available to most JDPCs are fast becoming obsolete and other CSOs are taking over the initiative from the Church. The danger this spells is that these CSOs, who are sometimes being sponsored by foreign interests (which may not be beneficial to the Nigerian people), will control the conversation and directly or indirectly impose their will on the trajectory Nigeria is taking as a nation. This does not mean that the Church cannot partner with these CSOs but that we remain significant and influential stakeholders in Nigeria's democracy.

Another issue worth highlighting is that many diocesan JDPCs have inadequately trained staff as well directors. This has made the endeavour to engage the Church in Nigerian democracy more challenging. When agents of the Church are not adequately trained, they cannot do much to promote the efforts of the Church, no matter how well-intentioned they are.

## Conclusion

The struggle for a better Nigeria is evident also the responsibility of the Church. There is a need for the Church in Nigeria to constantly be aware of her identity as

a Family and as the People of God. This ecclesial identity implies that everything possible needs to be done to fulfil the mandate given by Christ to his Church. The integral wellbeing of the human person should never be lost in the consciousness of the Church.

This implies that the Church should be properly equipped to face the challenges of her role of ensuring a thriving democracy in Nigeria. We need to live out what we preach and ensure that we continue to be a model for what the larger democratic society should be. Priests, religious, pastoral agents, and staff of Church agencies should be properly trained to meet the demands of modern-day advocacy and project implementations for proper and effective engagement in the democratic process. The Church should continue to lead in holding political leaders accountable for their policies and promises. Our voice should be amplified, but our actions should speak more and do more.

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Democracy seems to be endangered. In the face of growing inequalities propelled by neo-liberal free-market mechanisms, hyper-nationalist movements have emerged across the world, manifesting deep-seated resentment and anger among large sections of people that have telling consequences on the democratic practices. In such a volatile context, this volume is in search of a biblical founded theological and ethical position to populism, nationalism and post-democratic positions. Drawing upon Catholic Social Thought and socio-political insights, the particular articles respond to current developments in an international context. The offered catholic theological reflections hope to highlight new insights and narratives that have potential to foster the deepening of democracy and democratic values.

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