

The Role of the Priest in Politics: Filipino Context

Introduction

The issue is one of those topics that keep splashing the public attention through the mass media, and yet one on which confusion more than clarity seems to prevail.

On the one hand, we have official documents of the Church telling us about the involvement of the Community and her members in world affairs;¹ on the other hand, the Pope, during his trip to Latin America and India was often quoted enjoining priests to stay out of politics.

In predominantly Christian countries, the laymen keep looking up to the hierarchy for guidelines and directions on social and political issues. When such guidelines are slow in arriving, they even accuse the priests and bishops of living a dormant or comatose life on social and worldly issues. Still, very often in those same countries, governments expect and even demand that bishops and priests stay out of the spotlight when it comes to social and political life.

Are priests called to take over the reigns of the governments to correct whatever evils of corruption and mismanagement as perceived by the people, or should they rather be relegated to the

¹ "Gaudium et Spes" — "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World", in *The Documents of Vatican II*, Ed. by Walter M. Abbot, N.Y.: Guild Press, 1966.

purely spiritual areas? Are priests called upon to be on the front line of public service or cloistered in the sacristies?²

That seems to be the dilemma that has come to polarize public opinion all over the world, and more concretely in the Philippines, for while the components of the "People's Power" seem to welcome, encourage and even demand the involvement of priests in all sectors of public life, the hard core "Loyalists" and the ones who composed the former government look upon such an involvement either as an unwelcome interference of the Church in the affairs of the State, or worse as a subversive involvement of the clergy in connivance with the enemies of the government.

The issue has become even more complicated due to the ongoing controversy on Liberation Theology. For while the Vatican has seen fit to pronounce itself on certain aspects of Liberation Theology perceived as controversial or erroneous, certain sectors related to the former government and even some groups of the Church, taking the statements out of their contexts, have seen in those pronouncements an outright condemnation of Liberation Theology and of every issue on which those theologians stand for.

One cannot overlook the fact both sectors of that polarization claim loyalty to the Catholic faith and even support their positions by quoting from official sources. What then can the ordinary faithful think? Which is the correct path to be trodden by the clergy?

We figure out that the issue will remain confused unless one comes to clarify previously several points of order namely: what is meant by politics, how do we understand the target, objective of the so called "city of man", of public life? Besides, it is of the utmost importance to analyze both the nature of the priests and of the priestly functions. In other words, is the priest pure "priesthood"? Or is he also, and before hand, a man, a citizen of this world? In his actions, is the priest expected to function purely as priest, or is he supposed to act before hand as citizen? Is there, in one word, an overlapping; a contradiction of func-

² "Los Católicos en la Vida Pública", Texto de la Instrucción de la Conferencia Episcopal Española, *Vida Nueva*, 1.527 (Mayo, 1986), pp. 17-34.

tions? Can we validly ask whether, in the first place, the dilemma is fake, whether to start with there is not such either or, whether other options, valid options, are possible and even more correct?

1. — *The Meaning of Politics*³

a) There is, first of all, an *etymological* meaning of the term "politics" equivalent to "city" and its population, the citizens, and implying the exercise in the governing of the "polis" or citizenry.

In its original meaning, therefore, politics has to do with the organization and governing of the people, in itself a noble and laudable effort that requires prudence and practical wisdom. A politician in this sense would be a combination of the qualifications that nowadays we expect in a company executive and in a judge.

b) Politics has *developed* a further meaning as a result of of the interdependence of societies and cultures. Hence, at present politics is considered a practical art and a scientific field engaged in the smooth governing of a nation and its corresponding inter-national relations. Politics, then, trains leaders to handle one's own society and its international relations.

A politician in this sense has to be a combination of a governor and of a diplomat, since in many ways every nation, small as it may be, is a mixture of different communities with different outlooks and interests. A good politician, then, is the leader who works to maintain the proper balance of groups and interests in the handling of the common welfare of all and promoting the progress of his citizenry in their relations with other societies, as well as the development of the different groups without suppressing any minority or over favoring any particular interest. This requires a lot of skills, prudence and a broad overall view of his own society as well as of its international role.

The third meaning of the term "politics" has to do with shrewd, crafty and uncrupulous line of action where the only criterion is *expediency* and survival.

³ Karl Rahner, Ed., *Sacramentum Mundi*, Barcelona: Herder, 1974, vol. 5, pp. 494-499.

A politician in this context will have more of a maveric character trained in the Machiavelian school. Politics in this context, then, would be synonymous with dirty games, and politicians would be the equivalent of opportunists, of mercenaries at the service of whichever vested interests would pay them more.

At the time of the Renaissance, this kind of people used to be called "*condottieri*", well armed and well trained warriors selling their services to the best payer. In modern times, they may not be armed warriors, and the lords whom they serve may not be in the front line of public appearance, but disguised in the economic interests of businessmen or of multinational companies who grease the political machinery.

These "politicians", then, are authentic demagogues in whose objectives the welfare of the people, the good of their "constituents", is the farthest thing from their minds. Opposite to such an image is the figure of the "statesman" who projects an image of fairness and honest service for the good of the nation.⁴

With this threefold vision of politics, it is easy to understand why the involvement of priests, or even of Christians in politics, could become a source of such a bitter controversy, exaggerations and misunderstandings. In a parallel context, one is reminded of the time when the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery of a Pontifical University opened a course on "Physical Therapy" (a preparatory course leading to Medicine proper). Many parents had seen openly displayed in neon signs announcements of "massage parlors" with "expert physical therapists" in attendance. Knowing what kind of massages and monkey business were going on in such parlors, the very last thing that many parents had in mind was to allow their daughters to enroll in such a course where their children would become "expert physical therapists". The misunderstanding became so acute that for a time some sectors of the school administration even thought of changing the name of the course for a more "dignified" one. Why? Because the "dignified" name and profession had been "undignified" by the massage parlors and prostituted by their attendants. Such analogy may enlighten the present issue on politics.

⁴ Cf. "*Gaudium et Spes*", *l.c.* nn. 73-75.

2. — *The Objective of Politics*

Aware of the variety of meanings and applications of the term "politics", we wish to analyze "The Role of the Priest in Politics" by identifying politics in its original meaning and its developed academic concept. In this context, then, we study the *objective* of politics.

The scholastics used to call that objective the "common good", a denomination that somehow creates the impression that being so "common" everybody knows it by its nickname, and being so "good" it can easily be identified and shown for public display as a living reality. Technically the common good is described as "the happiness which will accrue to society as a whole";⁵ or also as "the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment... and consequently involves rights and duties with respect to the whole human race".⁶

The issue on the common good is more easily described than touched in its reality, and the reason is complicated. Men are said to be equal, and so we are. But then we are keenly aware that men are not equal, that men are *basically* equal insofar as reasoning capacity is concerned. It is also scientifically proven that the IQ scale gives us a picture of men immensely different in their *functional* and intellectual perception. The same could be said of man's will power and of man's emotional perception. For if anything, these human antenae show a tremendous variety of projections not only between men, but even by the same man at different times and under different stimuli.

Taking these considerations into account, one comes to realize how difficult then will be to grasp the exact measurement of man's happiness; for while some men would perceive their happiness in terms of finances, others will see it based on erotic pleasure, on food, while others would search for it through sports, arts, or science, etc.

⁵ Francis L. B. Cunningham, *The Christian Life* (3), Dubuque, Iowa: The Priory Press, 1959, p. 213.

⁶ "Gaudium et Spes", *l.c.*, n. 26; cf. *Ibid.*, n. 74.

How then could "politics" strive to pursue its objective to work for the "common good" without plunging into a chaotic quantity of choices, or into a quandary of confusion? Such risk is undeniable, hence that *rationality* in a context of *proportionality* has to prevail in the pursuit of the objective of politics. The citizens are made to understand that they have to give up part of their individual freedom in order to have a relatively free society. Thus, they have to sacrifice part of their quest for happiness in order to live in a relatively happy society.

The target of politics then is to work unceasingly for the search of that relatively happy society through the harmonious interplay of the diversity of interests. One can even add that in this context, the better politician is the one who within that interplay of forces strives to favor the "handicapped" of society.

Politics then is the task of constantly working to build up "the city of man" in order to make it a more comfortable place to live in. Man, being social by nature has to work in that building within our interchained process, and the coordination of that social interplay is the work of the true politicians.

3. — *The Priest's Roots*

Here one has to stress the scholastics' saying: "Grace builds on nature". "Grace presupposes nature". The issue is not about grace or about nature, but rather about the implication of that principle, namely, that the level of nature is not destroyed by any superseding level.

A priest is a human being with three superseding levels. A priest is, first of all, a *human* being. God may or may not be in a mood to perform miraculous events calling to the priestly ministry humans with mental or physical deficiencies. One thing, though, is certain, that the ones whom God calls to the priestly ministry are all *humans*. Any other kind of creatures, animals or angels, are excluded.⁷

That means that a priest must be above anything else human in his constitution and dynamics, with the corresponding

⁷ Cf. Braulio Peña, *Soteriology*, Manila: UST Printing Office, 1985, p. 494.

assets and liabilities that concur to the human condition. Manicheism has no room at this level. Man is neither intrinsically evil, nor is he expected to be angelic, but simply human, i.e., fundamentally good by creation; dynamically weak by his fall; expectantly holy due to Jesus' redemption.

Up and above, but not without his humanity, a priest is a Christian. This is already a higher level in a priestly life, a level on which grace builds upon nature, not a level where grace destroys or makes nature (humanity) disappear.

As a Christian, a man, while remaining a citizen of the world, aims for a higher fatherland. A Christian's life is guided by a radical option taken at the moment of his baptism. This option is not an option on his human condition, but a commitment on his dynamics, meaning to say, a Christian remains human; but the direction of his actions is uplifted. And here again the scholastic principle holds true. Christian grace does not destroy any thing human; neither is a Christian expected to be unconcerned or uninvolved with the building of the city of man. Much the contrary, a Christian should be the salt and light (*Mtth.* 5:13-14), a true pioneer in working for the building of the city of man: "This council" — teaches Vatican II — "exhorts Christians, as citizens of two cities, to strive to discharge their earthly duties conscientiously and in response to the gospel spirit. They are mistaken who, knowing that we have here no abiding city but seek one which is to come, think that they may therefore shirk their earthly responsibilities. For they are forgetting that by the faith itself they are more than ever obliged to measure up to these duties, each according to his proper vocation. Nor, on the contrary, are they any less wide of the mark who think that religion consists in acts of worship alone and in the discharge of certain moral obligations, and who imagine they can plunge themselves into earthly affairs in such a way as to imply that these are altogether divorced from the religious life. This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age. Long since, the prophets of the Old Testament fought vehemently against this scandal and even more so did Jesus Christ Himself in the New Testament threaten it with grave punishments,

Therefore, let there be no false opposition between professional and social activities on the one part, and religious life on the other. The Christian who neglects his temporal duties neglects his duties toward his neighbor and even God, and jeopardizes his eternal salvation".⁸

Still, it is not the pioneering spirit that should distinguish the *human* Christian from the non-Christian. Rather it is the direction that he gives to that pioneering work, for while the non-Christian's objective ends within that framework of the city of man, the Christian's objective supersedes, transcends (without destroying or ignoring it) such target and uplifts it to the level of the divine, the work for "the city of God".

An ancient Christian document that dates back to the second century, enlightens us on this issue: "Christians" —it says— "are indistinguishable from other men either by nationality, language or customs. They do not inhabit separate cities of their own, or speak a strange dialect, or follow some outlandish way of life... They follow the customs of whatever city they happen to be living in... And yet there is something extraordinary about their lives. They live in their own countries as though they were only passing through. *They play their full role as citizens*, but labor under all disabilities of aliens. Any country can be their homeland, but for them their homeland, wherever it may be, is a foreign country... They pass their days upon earth, but they are citizens of heaven. Obedient to the laws, they yet live on a level that transcends the law".⁹

The main thrust here, therefore, is the fact that the *Christian* remains *human* with all the consequences, and that no amount of Christianity, of Christian grace will do away or exempt him from his humanity. What a Christian does is to make sure that his "higher" level of direction will not be compromised by his human dynamics, but that these will remain the foundations on which he will uplift his objective. Docetism, or the mere "appearance" of humanity in a Christian's life, has nothing to do with authentic theology.

⁸ "Gaudium et Spes", *l.c.*, n. 43; cf. *Ibid.*, nn. 2-3.

⁹ "Letter to Diognetus", nn. 5-6, Funk, *Patres Apostolici*, 397-401.

Now, beyond the human and Christian levels, but not without them, a priest is a *minister*. Here again the scholastic saying holds true, grace does not destroy but builds on nature. This means that the priest remains, for better or for worse, human and Christian, with his human constitution and dynamics as well as with his radical Christian option to uplift the direction of his human life and standards. Up and beyond that, the priest commits himself to the level of the ministry. This level of the ministry commits the priest to the building of the city of man (as *human*), to the radical option of transcendence, of a higher objective (as *Christian*), and then to his ministry (as *priest*).

The ministry is basically a "diakonia", a commitment to the "service", to the soteriological service in its threefold aspect: as king, as prophet and as priest. As *king* the ministry commits the priest to a service of leadership, salvific leadership in building the Community based mainly on example. As *prophet* the ministry commits the priest to the service of the Word, the salvific Word, through the proclamation of the Gospel. As *priest* the minister is committed to the service of sanctification, not only through his example, but through the dispensation of the "sanctifying tools", of the "sacred", of the sacraments.

The thrust here is the fact that a *priest* remains a committed *Christian* and likewise *human*. What a priest ought to do is to make sure that his "ministerial level" will not be compromised by either his human constitution and dynamics or by his Christian objectives.

In summary, what we have here in this threefold level as minister, Christian and human is not a series of dilemmas, of either or, but a series of reinforcing, sublimating levels. Neither Manicheism nor Docetism has any role to play in this superseeding structure. True theology does not accept the Manichean view of man and of creation as composed of two equally radical elements, good and evil. Neither Christian theology embraces the Docetic view that grace does somehow make the human level disappear, or become artificial and unrealistic.

A priest will be a better minister if he is more (not less) Christian than other Christians, and more (not less) human than

other humans. These are, then, the true roots of a priestly life, and on these roots his role will be based and his functions will be guided.

4. — *The Priest's Role in Politics*

The previous pointer has concluded for us that a priest is not only a minister, but a Christian and a citizen as well, committed not to the destruction of the city of man, neither exempted from working for its development, but radically involved in its building and sublimation.

Now, granting that the premises set down in the three previous pointers are acceptable, one will be in a position to lay down the guidelines for an appropriate understanding of the role of the priest in politics.

a) To start with, a priest should have nothing to do with politics as described in its Machiavelic meaning of "crafty and uncrupulous line of action where the only criterion is expediency". For a priest to become a politician according to this pattern would amount to a total negation of his ministry, and even of his radical option as a Christian.

But then, what about the involvement of a priest in politics if we understand politics in its *etymological* and *scientific* meaning? Denying the priest any role in such political exercise would be tantamount to the denial of the priestly roots as a Christian, and as human, as a citizen involved in the development of the city of man.¹⁰ Such a denial would be based only on a Manichean approach to the issue that would consider any involvement in worldly affairs as radically evil. Or the denial would be conceived on a Docetic perception of the priestly ministry that would consider it as a grace over, above and independent of God's creation of the material cosmos and of humanity, making any "political" involvement in the building of the city of man as "unworthy" of the priestly ministry.

¹⁰ "Los Católicos en la Vida Pública", Texto de la Instrucción de la Conferencia Episcopal Española, *Vida Nueva*, 1.527 (Mayo, 1986), pp. 17-34.

It can be stated, therefore, that in the etymological and scientific understanding of politics, there is nothing unworthy or intrinsically incompatible between the political exercise and the priestly ministry. Like, it can be asserted that there is nothing intrinsically incompatible between the exercise of medicine and the priestly ministry, or between practicing law and the priestly ministry, or between finances and the priestly work. Concerning the nature of political participation, Vatican II has said: "The Church regards as worthy of praise and consideration the work of those who as a service to others, dedicate themselves to the welfare of the state and undertake the burdens of this task".¹¹

b) What can be said about the *objectives* of politics and the priestly work? The answer to this question will depend on the way one grasps the meaning of politics. After all, it is said in philosophy that the objective determines the formality of work.

It has been established that the "common good" is the objective of authentic politics. It was acknowledged that the common good is "the happiness which will accrue to society as a whole"; it is the building of the city of man. In biblical language, the common good could be perceived in the command of Yahweh to our ancestors: "Be fruitful, multiply and subdue the earth" (*Gen.* 1:28).

Hardly therefore could anybody find an intrinsic incompatibility between the ministerial work of the priest and the objective of politics. The issue that arises here on the objective, like the issue of the nature of politics, has nothing to do with an inner incompatibility, but it is rather a question of priorities, as will be explained more in detail later on. At present, let it suffice to establish the fact that there is no inner incompatibility between the priestly ministry and the nature and objective of politics.

c) What can then be said about politics and the involvement of the priest at his *threefold* level? Perhaps we ought to insist once again here on two pointers, that grace does not destroy nature and, secondly that nature is fundamentally good. These pointers, then, when applied to the priestly functions would

¹¹ "Gaudium et Spes", *l.c.*, n. 75.

mean that the ministry does not destroy the Christian and human aspects of the priest, and secondly that the human factor, to start with, is fundamentally good, and it is supposed to be sublimated (not destroyed) to the level of the divine.

In practical terms this means that a priest is by no means curtailed, because of his ministry, in the proper reaffirmation and development of his human constitution and rights, as well as of his Christian character and functions. Further more, it means that no authority has the power to suppress a priest's rights and functions either as a citizen or as a Christian. That a priest personally chooses the option to get involved in some medical, financial, social or political work is of no business of the government to interfere with his decision. To do so would amount to a denial of the priest's fundamental rights that he has as any other citizen.

The government may embody laws regulating the qualifications required from any candidate who wishes to exercise any public service, including, as it is presently done; the qualifications required for the exercise of medicine, law or finances. To insert into such legislation any limitations due to religion, or any religiously associated factors, will simply be a blunt interference of the government into the conscience of some of its citizens and an unacceptable descrimination based on bigotry and prejudice.

Our position then is this: a priest, like any other Christian or like any other citizen, is entitled to involve himself freely in politics or in any social or public service that does not attempt against the security of the nation, of the society in which he lives.

5. — *Related Issues*

Once that position is made clear to the people involved in the different branches of the government, as well as to any party involved in the mass media, or for the matter to anybody else, then one can discuss separately some related issues to the topic on the role of the priest in politics.

a) Canon 139 of the old ecclesiastical law established: "Clerics should not accept public offices that require the exercise of jurisdiction or of civil administration" (#2).

"Clerics should not run for senators or deputies, neither should they accept such positions without permission from the Holy See" (#4).

In the new legislation, canon 285 says: "Clerics are forbidden to assume public office whenever it means sharing in the exercise of civil power" (#3).

Canon 287 establishes: Clerics "are not to play an active role in political parties or in directing trade unions, unless, in the judgment of the competent ecclesiastical authority, this is required for the defence of the rights of the Church or to promote the common good" (#2).

Why those pieces of ecclesiastical legislation? The only way one can come to an understanding of the philosophy behind the legislation is by analysing the premises of canon 285: "Clerics are to shun completely everything that is unbecoming to their state, in accordance with the provisions of particular law" (#1).

"Clerics are to avoid whatever is *foreign* to their state, even when it is not unseemly" (#2).

These clauses have been rightly explained because abstention from things that are improper and unbecoming to the clergy is based on the dignity and holiness of the clerical state".¹² In other words, what we have in this ecclesiastical legislation is not a condemnation of something considered as intrinsically evil, like some social or public professions, specifically politics. If such would be the case, no amount of dispensation from the Local Ordinary or from the Roman Pontiff could turn an evil profession into an honest activity. Dispensations to exercise such activities do occur. Hence that intrinsic malice of such activities is to be excluded as the foundation for such pieces of legislation.

A far more enlightening course is the consideration that the philosophy for such legislation is based "on the dignity and holiness of the clerical state". What we are confronted with here is not with a dilemma between evil and good, but with a legislation that demands from the candidates to the ministry to opt for the best, instead of questing only for the better or for what is simply good.

¹² Excelso García, *Manual for Parish Priests*, Manila: UST. Printing Office, 1983, p. 67.

In this context then, the involvement of the priest in "public offices sharing in the exercise of civil power", or the involvement of the priests in politics has to be viewed first of all as a positive element of legislation that directs the activities of the clergy beyond what is seen as good or better. Secondly this legislation has to be understood not as a "right" or privilege rendered by the Church to the civil authority, but as an "internal affair" of the Church regulating the pursuits of her leaders.

In the last analysis then, that "dignity and holiness" is concerned not with a moral issue, but with a matter of *priorities*: namely, the Church's concern for the highest priorities in the pursuits of the clergy, in their exercise of the ministerial functions, namely: to proclaim the Word, to build the Church, and to sanctify the faithful. Confronted with that priority, the legislation of the Church enjoins her leaders *not to compromise* such ministry with any other option, even if it is fundamentally honest. Thus understood, that is a positive piece of ecclesiastical legislation an enjoinder to the clergy to trodden the unblemished path, to choose the highest of several options. It is not a prohibition or a condemnation of an alternative function.

How could the priority of the ministerial work be compromised by the involvement of the priest in politics? It could happen because of the *intensity* of the involvement requiring time and attention, thereby neglecting the priestly ministry. This is theologically a valid ground, but then it would be extensive not only to politics, but to finances and to any other kind of administrative functions. Another source of possible compromise of the ministry's "dignity and holiness" could be the divisive "*ideology*" of political parties, thereby making the priest and his actions "partisan" instead of "catholic" and open to all the faithful as a bridge of peace, justice and love. Hence the enjoinder of canon 287: "Clerics are always to do their utmost to foster among people peace and harmony based on justice" (#1).

b) In the on-going controversy on the Theology of Liberation the Holy See has come out with two "Instructions" related to the issue.¹³

¹³ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the 'Theology of Liberation'", AAS, 76 (1984), pp. 867-877.

Idem, "Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation", *L'Osservatore Romano*, 15 (April 14, 1986), pp. 1-9.

The "Instructions" point out some controversial aspects of Liberation Theology and likewise some dangers to the Christian and priestly involvement into such liberation movement. The dangers are narrowed down to two areas, for it is claimed that Theology of Liberation is tainted with violence and with Marxist ideology.

Violence was frowned upon by Jesus who rebuked Peter with the words: "Put your sword back, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword" (*Mtth.* 26:52). Violence has been likewise consistently condemned, as a revolutionary struggle, by the traditional teaching of the Church. Only in case of "self-defence" has the Church accepted the violent option within her moral field of justifiable actions.

Some sectors of the Theology of Liberation, though, contend that the present social, political and economic structures are systems of violence and of oppression towards the poor and the handicapped, especially evident in most of the developing countries. Hence that violence is often seen as a legitimate option not only for lay Christians, but even for priests. Some of these theologians claim that only an armed struggle can overcome such violent structures. "What we need" -says Cone- "is the divine love as expressed in black power, which is the power of blacks to destroy their oppressors, here and now, *by any means* at their disposal".¹⁴

Vatican II, though, has laid down the official position of the Church this way: "It is lawful for them (citizens) to defend their own rights and those of their fellow citizens against any abuse of this authority, provided that in so doing they observe the limits imposed by natural law and the gospel".¹⁵

As for the accusation that Liberation Theology is tainted with Marxist ideology, not a few of their theologians observe that the social doctrine of the Gospel, in its radical option for the poor and the oppressed, is certainly "Marxist" and "anti-Capitalist". Besides, they point out, Jesus came to be before Marx, so it may be more appropriate to accuse Marxism of being tainted with Christian ideology.

¹⁴ James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (2), Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1986, p. 70.

¹⁵ "Gaudium et Spes", *l.c.*, n. 74.

Whatever the outcome of the controversy may be, it should be made clear that the priest has a ministerial priority to be a bridge of peace, justice and love. But then when such a priority is suppressed, the minister still has the legitimate option of violence in self-defence.

In terms of ideology, a total embrace of Marxist ideology, fundamentally atheist, cannot be acceptable to committed Christians. A co-existence, and even an active cooperation to pursue honest common targets of social justice and elimination of violent structures cannot be outright denounced without falling into some inconsistent positions, for the history of the Church is filled up with such examples of cooperation with Marxism, as well as with totalitarianism and capitalism, while maintaining its true identity and independence. The official standing of the Church in relation with Communism was spelled out by Vatican II in these terms: "While rejecting atheism, root and branch, the Church sincerely professes that all men, believers and unbelievers alike, ought to work for the rightful betterment of this world in which all alike live".¹⁶

What perhaps needs to be emphasized in outlining the correct understanding of Christian liberation is the final objective of authentic Liberation Theology, namely the *total* (not the partial) liberation of man; and also to stress the Christian and priestly *priorities* in the choice of its *procedures*, with the preference for the option of peaceful, just and loving means.

c) A final question on the involvement of the priest before *the presence of evil*.

The priest, we have stated, should not *compromise* in his ministerial functions the "dignity and holiness" of his office. In the presence of evil in politics, should the priest shrug on it as the appropriate procedure to avoid compromising his office, or should he opt for its denunciation?

In more than one way this issue is related to the previous one on violence, for no Christian can deny that evil is the worst kind of violence. Canon 287 #2 establishes two possible reasons

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, n. 21.

for allowing members of the clergy to get involved in political action, namely: "For the defence of the rights of the Church or to promote the common good". Could the defence of the rights of the Church and the promotion of the common good be considered as the opposite of violence? Certainly the defence of one's own rights could be viewed that way, as an act of self-defence, not necessarily against physical, but against legal violence.

The presence of evil, though, poses a more delicate issue, for while it intrinsically violates the very essence of what Christianity stands for, nevertheless, evil is quite often covered under seemingly "legal" masks or even under the inner sanctuary of the individual conscience. Hence that its denunciation may provoke far reaching consequences and extremely sensitive feelings. Still, it is theologically correct to assert that moral evil is the worst kind of violence against what Christianity stands for. Thus, the legitimacy and moral permissibility of priests involving themselves in the denunciation of evil has solid foundation under the principles for which Christianity stands for.

Beyond the "permissibility", lies a further question, for permissibility could imprint a frame of mind whereby priests may draw themselves into a position of silence or even of comfort under the alibi that what is permissible is paramount to a privilege, and as such it is to the priest to exercise such a privilege or not. Then one could ask, when the presence of evil in a nation is such that it seriously and openly attempts against the pursue of the common good, shouldn't the attitude of *silence*, or the position of *comfort* turn to be a compromise of the priestly functions, a silent endorsement of moral violence? In other words, the question is: when the presence of evil seriously and openly disrupts the quest for the common good, are priests *obliged* to denounce it or not?

It has been established that there are three ministerial functions: to lead, to sanctify and to proclaim the Gospel. The three are not functions offered to the priest as assorted privileges to be disposed of at one's own whimsical time. They are three challenges to action. Their mere silence or inaction constitutes a betrayal of the ministry, for such is the meaning of the "*diakonia*"

as explained by Jesus himself: "The Son of Man has come not to be served, but to serve" (Mk. 10:45). It is a "*diakonia*" to action. It is an *obligation* on the part of the priest to lead, to sanctify and to proclaim.

Consequently, concerning the denunciation of evil, the priest has accepted not a privilege, but the obligation to *lead*, to sanctify and to proclaim the truth and goodness of the Gospel. It is in that proclamation where a negative aspect exists, and it is *the denunciation of evil*.

In the exercise of that *prophetic* role of denunciation, the priest is painfully aware of the possible violent reaction, with the probable result of some *suffering consequences* for the prophetic denouncer, for the priest, and even for the Community. Such is the lot of the prophet.¹⁷

This painful sequential outcome ought to be a reason for a measured restraint and avoidance of precipitated action, but it should never be an excuse for permanent silence, or, worse; for a restraint based on a refusal to compromise one's own comfort.

Delicate indeed, but unmistakably clear is the role to which priests are called upon to play and involve themselves in the realm of politics.

6. — *Filipino Context*

The theological and ecclesiastical legal guidelines have been laid down. At the national context, one kept hearing regularly for the past twenty years or so from the official circles of Malacañang, as well as from its journalistic mouthpieces, the perennial threats and anathematizations of the clergy due to their alleged "interference" in politics.

A proper understanding of the theological teaching and of the legal philosophy involved in the issue should be enough to put to rest such "historical" threats and any future revival of such anathematizations from whatever sources they may come.

¹⁷ B. Peña, O.P., *Soteriology*, p. 25.

Insofar as to whether or not it was appropriate to denounce an evil so rampantly and openly eroding the common good during the past political administration, one was simply numbed about the long ecclesial silence. When the public denunciation finally arrived from the highest levels of the Christian Community in the country, one felt finally relieved and somehow absolved of the inner guilt of silence.

That suffering and violence may have arrived, or may still arrive, as a result of such denunciation, it is quite possible and it has so been stated as an option still opened and not yet finalized.¹⁸

What is most important at this stage is, first of all, the proper understanding of the role of the clergy in political and public affairs, and as a follow-up for the present dispensation, the acceptance that once the public denunciation has taken place and supposedly the evil has been checked, the clergy's attitude is to retreat to its function of leadership in the Community building, of sanctification and of proclamation of the good news of the Gospel, leaving the running of the civil government and politics (in accordance with the ecclesiastical legislation) in the hand of the laymen.¹⁹ This, by no means, means that the proper place of the clergy is in the sacristy, as it is neither in the spotlight of the mass media coverage, but simply in the unwavering fulfillment of the functions of the ministry. In a related context about the role of the Church in the present world, Vatican II says: "In virtue of her mission and nature, she is bound to no particular form of human culture, nor to any political, economic or social system... She has no fiercer desire than that, in pursuit of the welfare of all, she may be able to develop herself freely under any kind of government which grant recognition to the basic rights of person and family and to the demands of the common good"²⁰

Concerning the overall view of the interrelationship of politics and the Church, Vatican II has laid down the following guide-

¹⁸ B. Peña, "Reflections from the Street Corners: On Prophetism", *Philippiana Sacra*, Vol. XXI, N. 62 pp. 239-244.

¹⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, Francisco Claver, "Church Power and the Revelation", *East Asian Pastoral Review*, 28 (1986), 104-110.

²⁰ "Gaudium et Spes", *l.c.*, n. 42.

lines: It is highly important, especially in pluralistic societies, that a proper view exist of the relation between the political community and the Church. Thus the faithful will be able to make a clear distinction between what a Christian conscience leads them to do in their own name as citizens, whether as individuals or in association, and what they do in the name of the Church and in union with her shepherds".

"The role and competence of the Church being what it is, she must in no way be confused with the political community, nor bound to any political system. For she is at once a sign and a safeguard of the transcendence of the human person".

"In their proper spheres, the political community and the Church are mutually independent and self-governing, yet, by a different title, each serves the personal and social vocation of the same human beings. This service can be more effectively rendered for the good of all, if each works better for wholesome mutual cooperation, depending on the circumstances of time and place. For man is not restricted to the temporal sphere. While living in history he fully maintains his eternal vocation..."

"There are, indeed, close links between earthly affairs and those aspects of man's condition which transcend this world. The Church herself employs the things of time to the degree that her own proper mission demands. Still she does not lodge her hope in privileges conferred by civil authority. Indeed, she stands ready to renounce the exercise of certain legitimately acquired rights if it becomes clear that their use raises doubt about the sincerity of her witness or that new conditions of life demand some other arrangement".

"But it is always and everywhere legitimate for her to preach the faith with true freedom, to teach her social doctrine, and to discharge her duty among men without hindrance. *She also has the right to pass moral judgments, even on matters touching the political order, whenever basic personal rights or the salvation of souls make such judgments necessary. In so doing, she may*

use only those helps which accord with the gospel and with the general welfare as it changes according to time and circumstance".

"Holding faithfully to the gospel and exercising her mission in the world, the Church consolidates peace among men, to God's glory. For it is her task to uncover, cherish, and ennoble all that is true, good, and beautiful in the human community".²¹

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²¹ "Gaudium et Spes", *l.c.*, n. 76.