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Catholic Action, Authority, and Philippine Democracy: Prospects and Perspectives through Jacques Maritain

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Abstract

This paper analyzes how Jacques Maritain anticipated much of the questions that can be raised concerning the Church's active participation today in matters that many have supposed to pertain only to politics: To what extent is the Church's involvement in political life permissible in light of its perceived duty to translate its apostolic and spiritual values into social actions? What boundaries does the Church recognize regarding a proper delineation between the spiritual and temporal spheres towards the linking of which Catholic Action is said to be directed? To what limits can the Church exercise its *auctoritas* within a personalist democracy that emphasizes the common good as its chief aim for the human community? Insights in response to these will show that far from 'meddling' with or 'disrupting' the political order, the Church's approaches are sensible and just within a democracy that Philippine politics embraces.

Keywords: *democracy, power and authority, Catholicism, and Church and State*

Reproductive health, same-sex marriage, divorce, death penalty, abortion – apart from being matters of moral and socio-political debates, what brings these issues together, especially in the minds of those well-attuned to the legislative proceedings, is the Catholic Church's staunch and undaunting opposition. As the celebration of its centennial

anniversary in the country draws to a close, its role in Philippine societal dynamics becomes a subject for revisiting. It cannot be denied that Rodrigo Duterte's lambasting of the Church's institutional hierarchy and some of its doctrinal tenets before the public sphere had further provoked the already waning influence of Catholicism and the advancement of secularism in the archipelago. Regardless, the Philippines remains "the cradle of Christianity in the Far East,"¹ and as such, it is not without significant relation even to the affairs of a 'secularizing' country.² Indeed, such relation is "one of power, or of the contingencies of power itself,"³ which explains why despite backlashes within and without the Church, it has maintained its unhampered impact on policies that it deems to be within its moral responsibility, and, ultimately, its duty aimed at the "salvation of souls."

It is in this spirit that the Church seeks to promote "justice through efforts to bring about openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good,"⁴ figuring prominently in the aforementioned issues among others, and empowering its laity to speak up against them in accordance with Catholic teachings and precepts.⁵ Lest we become

¹ Rhoderick John S. Abellanosa, "Philippine Catholicism and Secularization: Face-Off, Denial or Dialogue," *Asian Horizons* Vol. 7 (September 2013): 548.

² The phenomenon of secularization is understood here as that where religion was compelled to abandon the monopoly on interpreting and structuring human life; modernity's response to religion's totalizing influence on all facets of social life, especially as manifested during the Middle Ages (cf. Jürgen Habermas, "Pre-Political Foundations of the Democratic Constitutional State?" in Habermas, J. and Ratzinger, J. *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion*, trans. Brian McNeil, CRV (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2006), 49).

³ Virgilio Aquino Rivas, "The Role of the Church in the Politics of Social Transformation: The Paradox of Nihilism," *Politics and Religion* Vol. 2, No. 3 (2008): 55.

⁴ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 28a. URL: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html. Last Accessed: April 11, 2022.

⁵ For instance, when the Reproductive Health Bill was still being legislated, Lipa Archbishop Ramon Arguelles, without any sugarcoating, described the possibility of implementing such a bill as a law to be the "start of the genocide of our own people by our government" (Philip C. Tubeza, "Church won't stop opposing RH law," *Inquirer.Net*, January 18, 2013, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/342809/church->

ambivalent to this reality due to detractors, significant events in recent Philippine history exhibit the Church's self-imposed dedication to either extend its hand or make its objections known. To this day, the 1986 EDSA Revolution serves as a paradigm in making sense of the Catholic Church's involvement in political concerns; together with a people saturated by unrest, a long-desired liberation had put an end to a regime already bereft of moral integrity. The acts of the Philippine Church through the Catholic Bishops Conference had shown how the regard for the sanctity of morals and the value of the common good enjoys primacy over any kind of political intent – from its early tolerations of the implementation of the Martial Law, to its gradual and successive releasing of referenda and plebiscites that began in 1973 to address its lapses and abuses; from the silencing of the press, to 'communist hunts,' tortures and killings, human

wont-stop-opposing-rh-law). Similar opposition figures in the issue of same-sex marriage through a 2015 statement of the Catholic Bishops Conference (CBCP), saying that "a homosexual union is not and can never be a marriage as properly understood and so-called" (Agence France-Presse, "Catholic bishops urge followers to oppose same-sex marriage," *Inquirer.Net*, August 31, 2015, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/717936/catholic-bishops-urge-followers-to-oppose-same-sex-marriage>). The CBCP also, through Lingayen archbishop Socrates Villegas, pleaded with those responsible for the killing sprees of alleged drug-related criminals: "For the good of the country, stop the killings! The toll of 'murders under investigation' must stop now" (Paterno Esmaguél III, "CBCP: 'In the name of God, stop the killings!' *Rappler*, September 12, 2017, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/181911-cbcp-statement-drug-war-killings-children-poor/>). Further, talks on divorce received similar criticisms from the CBCP Family and Life Office Finally on moral grounds, "as far as the objective moral law is concerned, it is an unjust law which cannot bind anyone in conscience" (CNN Philippine Staff, "Hontiveros defends divorce bills as Church members question constitutionality," *CNN Philippines*, September 17, 2019, <https://www.cnnphilippines.com/news/2019/9/17/Senate-divorce-bill-Church-Hontiveros.html>). Finally, concerning abortion, CBCP, through Fr. Jerome Secillano, declared its denunciation, for "aborting babies should not have a place in our society [and] the killing of the defenseless is the most senseless and dreadful of all crimes" (Agence France-Presse, "Church reiterates stand against abortion," *Manila Bulletin*, September 6, 2020, <https://mb.com.ph/2020/09/06/church-reiterates-stand-against-abortion/>). In these examples, the Catholic emphasis on the implementation of laws and condemnation of acts according to its moral principles takes a central place.

rights violations, and even to election anomalies.⁶ In truth, however, the fact that the same institution actively played a part in perhaps one of the most important changes that the revolution had effected, the drafting of 1986 Philippine Constitution, points to the reality of a legitimate political power that the Church possesses aside from its moral and spiritual domains.

Then CBCP President Ricardo Cardinal Vidal's pastoral letter on the ratification of the Constitution titled "A Covenant towards Peace" undergirds this for it "demonstrated how powerful and influential the CBCP was during this period in Philippine history."⁷ With these in mind, criticisms against the Church's supposed 'meddling' in political affairs seem to find their justification based on the very natures of the Church and of the state;⁸ thus, the doctrine of the separation of the church and state is brought to the fore. When in our time, the Church cannot but be entangled with the issues that inevitably encompass the moral sphere,

⁶ Jose Maria de Nazareno provides a comprehensive account of the Church's part in doing its perceived moral duties during the events surrounding the Marcos Administration and even more than a decade following the People Power, up until Joseph Estrada's stepping down from the presidency. For detailed explications of the referenda, memoranda, and plebiscites released by the CBCP in response to necessary concerns during the years of the Martial Law, cf. Chapters II to IV of *The Light of Christ in Philippine Politics: The Interventions of the Catholic Church in State Affairs (1972-2005)* (Makati: St. Pauls, 2016), 55-190.

⁷ de Nazareno, *The Light of Christ in Philippine Politics*, 207. Further, de Nazareno highlights the CBCP's attempt to align this influence with the values of the gospel, for the same pastoral letter reads that "the draft's many pro-life, pro-poor, pro-Filipino provisions...are consonant with authentic human values [and] that the provisions of the new draft Constitution are consistent with the teaching of the Gospel" (Ibid., 209). More, he points out that such a move on the Church's part proved to be of necessity in such a period of transition to the Aquino administration: "It has been a pattern in this land that every time there is a political crisis, the CBCP would always intervene voluntarily or inadvertently. The intervention of the CBCP in political affairs during the time of Cory Aquino was not just its initiative. The...administration, in fact, allowed it, if not encouraged it" (Ibid., 211).

⁸ The distinction between them, as Benedict XVI puts it following *Gaudium et Spes* (n. 36), lies in the "autonomy of the temporal sphere," whereas the Church has "a proper independence and is structured on the basis of her faith as a community," the affairs of 'politics' understood as the "just ordering of society" is the primary responsibility of the State (*Deus Caritas est*, 28a).

like a lance the doctrine is hurled at it by those who would take nothing from an intervening yet irrelevant and backward institution that has and is still seeking to hamper progress in many aspects of Philippine social life. Even without textual demonstration, such an occurrence is a regular happenstance made more noticeable with the aid of social media whenever the Church, through the CBCP or any of its prelates and clerics, raises concerns about the government's 'way of doing things.'

Such an approach to this political doctrine is incomplete, however, for it only takes into account the "powerful Church" wherein the "State must be constitutionally protected."⁹ In its defense, on the other hand, the Church is to be considered protected by the other end of the doctrine wherein given a "powerful State endowed with police power of aggression and coercion...the Church must be guarded."¹⁰ Notwithstanding this polarity, perhaps a more appropriate interpretation is one that gives credence to the "protection of both religious liberty and governmental autonomy."¹¹ Thus, to ensure the inviolability of this Church-State separation is to deter any possible absolutism that might arise from the over-exaltation of the power that both of them possess, for when the government is genuinely 'of the people, by the people, and for the people,' democracy is rightfully assured. This is presumably the reason why the Philippine Church is not and need not be bothered by accusations that pronounce its crossing of the constitutional demarcation between the Church and the State: its fight for liberation during the 1986 event was a battle for a sought-for democracy.

The Philippine Church clearly professes such close allegiance to democracy that for the CBCP, "to be Christians [is] to be lovers of democracy."¹² This same democracy empowers the Church's freedom of

⁹ De Nazareno, *The Light of Christ in Philippine Politics*, xxii.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Robert Audi, *Democratic Authority and the Separation of Church and State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 39.

¹² De Nazareno, *The Light of Christ in Philippine Politics*, 22.

expression; it is what fuels and validates the Church's power for political participation: "it must be allowed to engage politicians and state actors in the effort to achieve the ends of democracy."¹³ And so we return once more to the question of separation that is supposed to be "a major element in the limitation of democratic authority,"¹⁴ for if it is through democracy that the Church exercises its freedom to 'meddle,' so to say, in politics, then it should not be a question why it remains capable of doing so virtually unimpeded.

Even a cursory reference to the 1987 Constitution would attest to the centrality of freedom in the Church's immersion in Philippine politics, specifically when the Church, through its leaders, pronounces statements under the banner of morality and social justice significant to its witnessing to the Christian faith: "The free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship, without discrimination or preference, shall forever be allowed."¹⁵ This is why a freedom that operates "under law, and law for the enlargement of human freedom, and the development of human personality [constitutes] the basic principle of Christian democracy."¹⁶ Beyond economic preoccupations that foremostly consider the kind of production and ownership that must prevail in society, the democracy that the Church chiefly embraces – not for its own sake, for it can manage to "survive in closed, non-democratic societies" and "coexist with dictatorship and other forms of government,"¹⁷ but rather for the people – primarily protects the inviolable dignity and rights of every individual. In the light of such emphasis on the person and his freedom, the Church's participation in

¹³ Christopher Ryan Maboloc, "The Church of the Poor in our Time," *Pamisulu: Journal of Theology and Philosophy* Vol. 6, No. 1 (2018): 11.

¹⁴ Audi, *Democratic Authority and the Separation of Church and State*, 39.

¹⁵ Article III, section 5 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution. URL: <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/constitutions/1987-constitution/>. Last Accessed: April 13, 2022.

¹⁶ Pacifico Ortiz, SJ, "On Christian Democracy: Introductory Note," *Christian Democracy for the Philippines: A Re-examination of Attitudes and Views* (Malabon: Araneta University Press, 1958), 101.

¹⁷ De Nazareno, *The Light of Christ in Philippine Politics*, 22.

political life becomes clearer. For as long as there are factors, whether at the individual or the collective level, that hinder the full realization of human personhood, particularly the freedom seen in expression and action, the Church will remain with its “active engagements in the democratic processes... [by using] its moral influence to engage state actors.”¹⁸ This, as Benedict XVI calls it, is the Church’s “indirect duty; to contribute... to the reawakening of those moral forces without which just structures are neither established nor prove effective.”¹⁹

On Power and Authority: an Excursus

It may be redundant to reassert that the Church possesses the ‘power’ to intervene in state affairs under the pretext of religious expression. Fortified and encouraged by a person-centered democracy, it can “influence the dispositions and ways of thinking of those who are making the decisions,”²⁰ so long as the end in mind is the common good. At the same time, it would be irresponsible to not acknowledge how this power had been irresponsibly exerted and corrupted throughout history, for since the “institution is hierarchical, it can permit the abuse of power within its structures,”²¹ from delinquent and extravagant popes and cardinals to entitled and pedophilic priests. Power is a given for the Church, but what about authority, and what is the difference? If ‘power’ is to be understood simply as “the production of intended effects,”²² then in relation to democracy, it concerns the determining of “policies [for the state] by enforcing the will of the majority,”²³ what is wanted by most who consist of the populace. On the other hand, ‘authority’ is that

¹⁸ Maboloc, “The Church of the Poor in our Time,” 4.

¹⁹ *Deus Caritas est*, 29.

²⁰ Danilo S. Agustin, Jr., “Reimagining the Identity and Role of the Church in the Philippine Society Today,” *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy* Vol. 5, No. 1 (April 2019): 45.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

²² Bertrand Russell, *Power* (London/New York: Routledge, 1992), 25.

²³ Audi, *Democratic Authority and the Separation of Church and State*, 39.

which is capable of charging, leading, determining, and guiding,²⁴ and in connection with democracy, “the moral right to... exercise power within certain limits.”²⁵ While the former manages to be exercised in itself, the latter is that which permits power to be practiced without hindrance. Parallel to this, some scriptural references give a good picture of the political lamentation on the Church’s show of power. When Jesus performed deeds that inspired awe in the crowd and envy in the hearts of religious authorities, the latter posed: “By what authority do you do these things?”²⁶ They did not deny the power that was manifest in his works for its effects were apparent; it was his authority to do such things that they questioned and attempted to test. In the same vein, in his trial, it was Jesus who made Pontius Pilate realize that the power he possessed to have him either released or crucified is reliant on a more binding authority that grants Pilate this very power.²⁷

In response to this conceptual predicament concerning a justification for the Catholic Church’s ‘political’ interventions, twentieth-century Thomist Jacques Maritain’s socio-political thought will be explored in hopes of offering a sound understanding of the context that situates the ecclesial in inevitable contact with the political.

Between the Church and State: The Spiritual and Temporal Spheres

In whatever way we wish ‘democracy’ to be understood, within it are contained both “ephemeral and more permanently valid elements,”²⁸

²⁴ Cf. Jacques Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy and the Rights of Man and Natural Law*, trans. Doris C. Anson (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), 85, Adobe Digital Editions.

²⁵ Audi, *Democratic Authority and the Separation of Church and State*, 39.

²⁶ Mark 11:28; Cf. Luke 20:2.

²⁷ Cf. John 19:10-11.

²⁸ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness: A Vindication of Democracy and a Critique of its Traditional Defense* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 1.

and it is up to its constituents to discern which among the aspects of societal life belong to either. Perhaps, if not totally the case, it can be presumed that this initial distinction calls into mind the material and non-material facets of human society. On one hand, we can suggest all the measurable and tangible rudiments as the *de facto* characteristics of society's temporal sphere where the material is emphasized. Man himself, the constitutive factor of society's existence, realizes his transitory needs due to "the deficiencies of material individuality," and so finds himself dependent upon the greater collective as the "means to promote the temporal good of the society."²⁹ Conversely, all the aspirations and motivations that enable a dynamic endeavor towards the obtainment of this temporal good lie in the spiritual sphere's ordination towards "a destiny beyond time... [that is] the highest requirements of personality as such,"³⁰ like justice, peace, and even the foundation of democracy *per se* which is freedom.

Inasmuch as it is "the office of spiritual things to vivify the things of time,"³¹ it stands to reason that it be the abiding element of a democracy that caters to "two dimensions of human existence: to man's spiritual stature... as well as to the common necessities of all men."³² It must be noted though that while it almost always evokes a religious undertone, the contents of the spiritual sphere are not necessarily exclusive to the domain of religion. Maritain acknowledges that prior to any doctrine of matters of faith, man already has a "spiritual superexistence through knowledge and through love,"³³ both of which remain possible even in a highly secularized world. A nuanced point is thus implied that even when the inseparability of the spiritual and the

²⁹ Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, trans. John J. Fitzgerald (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 73

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

³¹ Jacques Maritain, *True Humanism*, in D. Gallagher and I. Gallagher (eds.) *A Maritain Reader: Selected Writings of Jacques Maritain* (New York: Image Books, 1966), 232.

³² Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, 3.

³³ Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy*, 82.

temporal is admitted in relation to human nature, religion is still not guaranteed an active place in the upkeep of these interrelated dimensions of human life and society as its macrocosm. This kind of reasoning remains prevalent in a secularizing age such as ours where many efforts are being done to “pass out [religion] out of public ownership into private hands,”³⁴ yet even in Maritain’s context a century ago, this same framework of thinking was already in effect.

When the philosophy of Karl Marx enthroned dialectic materialism as the primary determinant of the social order, the influence of the spiritual in the face of an industrializing world diminished, while the concern for the temporal drastically increased.³⁵ Furthered by the advances of technology and the sciences, along with the positivistic and reductionist assumptions attached to them, the ushering of a worldview that radically separated the material from the spiritual proved to be inevitable.³⁶ Maritain’s response, in a spirit reminiscent of St. Thomas Aquinas’ philosophy, involves the conception of a clear distinction between ‘the Christian World,’ a “sociological category...involved in the order and history of temporal civilizations,”³⁷ and ‘Christianity’ as that

³⁴ Terry Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2014), 2.

³⁵ Maritain qualifies this by opining that “the proper task of Marxism as a philosophy of resentment has been... to denounce ‘the lie of exalted ideas.’ It claims to pronounce a death sentence on idealism, both as a metaphysical doctrine... and...as a simple affirmation of the value of the immaterial in general” (Jacques Maritain, *Integral Humanism: Temporal and Spiritual Problems of a New Christendom*, trans. Joseph W. Evans. Notre Dame/Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press: 1973, 43).

³⁶ In addition, returning to the initial distinction between the Church and the State, even a teleological perspective shows that “their intrinsic antagonism as befits the view that the former is reserved for the political or the temporal while the latter for the spiritual and transcendental, are indispensable tensions in human time [where] necessary frictions are to be expected, if only to fully appreciate, for the sake of a religious tolerance of politics, the sense of the vitality immanent to movement...[which] renders contradictions indispensable.” This is visibly seen in issues where conflicts of interest, whether from the standpoint of responsibility or gain, are present (Rivas, “The Role of the Church in the Politics of Social Transformation,” 55).

³⁷ Jacques Maritain, *The Range of Reason* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1952), 115.

which is tied to a “religious and spiritual meaning.”³⁸ If the former finds “an earthly task to fulfill,”³⁹ given its preoccupation with “a particular body of cultural, political, and economic formations characteristic of a given age in history,”⁴⁰ the latter dedicates itself to the mission of “[giving] mankind salvation and eternal life.”⁴¹ At once, it seems that the fundamental difference between the temporal and spiritual spheres had just been highlighted, and nothing novel and enlightening is proposed.

For example, to describe the years leading to the 1986 Revolution as a characteristically ‘Christian World’ for Filipinos due to the roles effectively fulfilled by Christians concerning matters temporal is not different from describing the efforts to rebuild the siege-stricken Marawi by Islam brethren as constituting an ‘Islamic World’ – simply put, a label contingent on the identity of the collective adds nothing essential to the conceptual content already understood when the term ‘temporal’ is uttered. The same stands in terms of the spiritual whether it is ‘Christianity’ or the ‘Church’ that is being referred to; it is intuitively understood once the term is grasped. The brilliancy of Maritain’s distinction, thus, lies in his synthesis that makes a mutual implication between the two, a collaboration that does not compromise the unique roles assigned to each for the flourishing of their respective domains. Therefore, while it is true that “neither Christianity nor the Church has a mission... to bring about justice and freedom in the political society,”⁴² having the Gospel as its anchorage grants it the capacity of enabling the ‘Christian World’ to “work on earth for a socio-temporal realization of the Gospel truths.”⁴³ A radical perspective may give the interpretation that the power of the ‘Christian World’ in the temporal sphere merely serves the purposes of the Church without relinquishing its influence in the spiritual sphere; it is but the handmaiden of religion.

³⁸ Maritain, *Integral Humanism*, 42.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 43

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 42-3.

⁴¹ Maritain, *The Range of Reason*, 115.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 116. Cf. also *Deus Caritas est*, 28a (n. 8).

⁴³ Maritain, *Integral Humanism*, 43.

The problem with this retort is that it does not take into account what Maritain, through Henri Bergson, discerns to be essential in understanding the essence of democracy itself: it is “evangelical in essence and... its motive power is love.”⁴⁴ However, it must be noted that this does not present democracy as a political force but submissive to the Gospel, nor does it suggest that the Gospel and its religion “be made subservient to democracy as a philosophy of human and political life.”⁴⁵ Rather, the proper realization of their nexus should be seen in the light of society’s perceived goal, the “human good of the community” rooted in love as the abiding principle.⁴⁶

A materialistic conception of the ‘common good,’ needless to say, remains an option, and our world today is leaning towards such an attitude as implied earlier; spiritual ideals under the banners of ‘unity,’ ‘world peace,’ ‘harmony,’ among others, serve but pragmatic roles in a ‘progress’ that validates only economic and technological prosperity. Yet even in this scheme, Maritain’s picture of democracy, the temporal and spiritual spheres in concord, holds its ground, and though it be granted that “secularization is the hallmark of democracy, the desire for the common good is not necessarily precluded, allowing the evangelical preoccupation with love to penetrate and take root.

If for Maritain, therefore, neither a common good conceived as “exclusively a set of temporal advantages or achievements,”⁴⁷ nor one

⁴⁴ Henri Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality*, 243, cited by Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy*, 62.

⁴⁵ Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy*, 48.

⁴⁶ Benedict XVI describes ‘love’ as the indispensable element that makes politics itself possible: “Love – *caritas* – will always prove necessary, even in the most just society. There is no ordering of the State so just that it can eliminate the need for a service of love” (*Deus Caritas est*, 28b).

⁴⁷ Jacques Maritain, *Man’s Destiny in Eternity* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1949), 41. That is to say, if the notion of the ‘common good’ is devolved so as to recall even that which can be observed in “a bee-hive or an ant-hill...it would be nonsense for the life of a human person to be sacrificed to it,” such as the case in one’s submission of the individual will to the general will in Rousseau’s political philosophy (*Ibid.*).

as, in the context of the Church, instrumental “to make men happy,”⁴⁸ a more proper relationship should be laid down for the two spheres. He sees in the “horizontal movement of civilization,” that is, in the usual process of the world’s day to day existence, the prospect of the temporal in helping “the vertical movement of souls.”⁴⁹ The earthly paves the way for the heavenly, the ‘Christian World,’ for the Church and its mission of *salus animarum*.

It becomes a responsibility of religion, especially Christianity and its Church, to facilitate the “fecundation of social, temporal existence by spiritual experience, contemplative energies and brotherly love.”⁵⁰

Democracy and Authority

Through Maritain’s socio-political lenses, the vibrant connection between the temporal and spiritual spheres as manifested in the ‘Christian World’ and the Christian religion is presented as a sensible means of looking into the status of the Church-State discourse in the Philippines. Working toward the common good,⁵¹ reciprocal stimulus and motivation obtain in advancing the fulfillment of both these spheres and

⁴⁸ Maritain, *The Range of Reason*, 116.

⁴⁹ Jacques Maritain, “Christian Humanism,” *Fortune* Vol 25 (April 1942) in Gallagher and Gallaher (eds.) *A Maritain Reader*, 230.

⁵⁰ Maritain, *The Range of Reason*, 116.

⁵¹ Albeit in an indirect manner for the Church, since such common good serves only as the stepping stone towards the higher good of the salvation of the soul, the chief prerogative of the spiritual sphere, specifically of the Christian religion. It is noteworthy to quote Maritain at length in this regard: “Once man has understood that...politics depends upon morality because its aim is the good of the community...that political life must conform to natural law and, according to the special conditions of its temporal object, even to the law of the Gospel, he sees at the same moment that to call for justice and law in politics is to call for a great revolution which will substitute for the power politics of the masters...the politics of the common good. A community of free men cannot live if its spiritual base is not solely law...that brotherly love whose law was promulgated by the Gospel” (Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy*, 56-7).

dimensions of social and human existence. Ever since its arrival in the archipelago, the fertile ground of the Filipino milieu and cultures is what aided the growth of the Christian life upon which the Church draws its continual relevance. Similarly, the maintained impact of the spiritual life and religiosity of a majority of the country's population who adhere to the Christian way, particularly the Catholic tradition, seeks to exhibit its transformational power in society from time to time.⁵² With a stroke of emphasis, however, Maritain assigns the "sanctification of secular life" as the Church's 'authoritative' role.⁵³

Inspired by Bergson's accentuation, "in the democratic frame of mind," of the "great effort [to run] against the grain of nature,"⁵⁴ Maritain gives due significance to:

The influence of the Christian leaven...which requires that nature and the temporal order be elevated by the action of this leaven within their own realm, in the realm of civilization's movement.⁵⁵

After addressing the initial dichotomy between the temporal and the spiritual spheres within the context of secularism, the Church's justification for the question of authority remains. For if the Christian religion acknowledges the teachings of the Gospel, and that the same Gospel distinguishes between the "things that are Caesar's and the things that are God's," is the assertion that the Church still possesses a

⁵² The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II), underlain by the principles of the Catholic Social Teachings of the Second Vatican Council, stresses that "politics, like all human activities, must be exercised always in the light of the faith of the Gospel [that] cannot be sacrificed on the flimsy pretext that 'the Church does not engage in politics'" (n. 344) (Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* (Pasay: St. Paul Publications, 1995), 117-8).

⁵³ Maritain, *The Range of Reason*, 116.

⁵⁴ Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality*, 243, cited by Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy*, 62.

⁵⁵ Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy*, 62.

higher authority, in some respects, contradictory to this evangelical clarification? The rejoinder reviews the proper understanding of ‘authority’ – *auctoritas* – defined as the “right to direct and to command, to be listened to or obeyed by others.”⁵⁶ Already cognizant of the power that the Church can exercise even within the minutest extents of the temporal sphere, the only thing left is for this power to serve as the expression of authority. In fact, the mere affirmation of the existence of this power implicitly confirms this authority, for “to separate power and authority is to separate force and justice,”⁵⁷ to consider the effect without its very principle.

As alluded to earlier, Maritain’s socio-political thought operates within a democratic framework; a reaction against the more prevalent Rousseauian democracy that “*suppresses authority and preserves power.*”⁵⁸ It makes sense to suppose that the kind of authority that Maritain envisions is not one that requires obedience and enforces its will. Rather, it is one that directs the “democratic state of mind” toward its aims of “justice and law...linked to the respect and the love of the human person” subsumed under it.⁵⁹ *Auctoritas*, although it may be corrupted by the possibility of its abuse in totalitarianism or its suppression in anarchism, can never be separated not only from the State itself but more so in the moral order with which the Church is mostly concerned in its dealings with politics. If *auctoritas* cannot be eliminated from a democratic society, nor can it be equated with the extremes on either end, then its presence in an *organic democracy*, the ‘democracy of the person,’ proves to be the viable and most effective way of making itself evident and the people, aware of it.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Jacques Maritain, *Scholasticism and Politics*, trans. Mortimer J. Adler (New York: Image Books, 1960), 93.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁶⁰ “An organic democracy will not efface from its ideology the notion of authority. It will...make it evident because it will admit the following double truth of common sense: first...to obey him who really has the right to direct action; and

Authority and Catholic Action

Given the centrality of the person in Maritain's perspective on democracy, the aforementioned role of the Church in its authority beyond the spiritual sphere cannot but follow logically. More than the laws from which political authority derives its power and justification, the authority embraced by the Church finds its first origin in "a general conception of man and of the world."⁶¹ From the person, the microcosm of the totality of beings that unites the material and the spiritual, morality and justice spring forth, and so the authority bound by such principles evokes in itself, "not the desire to 'obey only oneself,' but rather the desire to obey only *whatever it is just to obey*."⁶² This authority, with its task of the "spiritualization of secular existence," finds completion in what Maritain calls *Catholic action*.⁶³ Identifying three levels wherein the activity of Christians is expected, Maritain delegates Catholic action in the first and third levels, reserving the second level, the temporal, for the accomplishment of political action.

second, to thus obey him who really fulfills the duty to direct the common work toward the common good" (Ibid., 101).

⁶¹ Ibid., 103.

⁶² Ibid. This precisely is Joseph Ratzinger's contention in his discussion of the possibility of a 'world *ethos*,' as Hans Küng refers to it, in the face of the challenges presented by secularism and interculturalism. It can be rightly assumed that a democratic society enables the collaboration of the citizens in formulating laws that would arbitrate their way of life, yet the problem that arises is not in participation but rather in creating consensus. To realize, thus, that "there are...self-subsistent values that flow from the essence of what it is to be a man, and are therefore inviolable," is to take a step toward the purification of 'the majority principle' that is held to be the defining characteristics of democracy (Joseph Ratzinger, "That Which Holds the World Together: The Pre-political Moral Foundations of a Free State," in Habermas, J. and Ratzinger, J. *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion*, trans. Brian McNeil, CRV (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2006), 60-1).

⁶³ Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy*, 62. Maritain is careful enough to differentiate between 'Catholic Action' as a proper noun, pertaining to "an official institution of the Church," and what he proposes (a common noun in his concern for technicality) to designate "a certain task and work which it is the object of Catholic Action (the proper noun) to organize." Despite this clarification, he notes that the notion itself "is not a new thing in the Church," for "it has always existed," although it has been reinvigorated by the documents of Pius X and Pius XI (Maritain, *Scholasticism and Politics*, 187).

These levels of activity properly assigned to Catholic action are equivalent to the concepts followed by the notion of authority working within an organic, personalist democracy. The first level that deals with the spiritual and concerns itself with “the things of God” recalls the obedience owed to that which has the “the right to direct action,” and the third level serves “the spiritual considered as joined to the temporal,” thus fulfilling the duty of our earthly existence and “work toward the common good.”⁶⁴ From this purview, Maritain’s synthesis leads us to the content of Catholic action itself which provides us the essential characteristic that the Vatican II accentuates regarding the Church’s relation with the world: “the Church may not be of the world, but it is definitely *in the world*.”⁶⁵ Even the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines underscores this in its description of a “renewed social apostolate” where the Church and its members are tasked to “promote human development, justice in society, and peace” accompanied by its spiritual prerogative of evangelization.⁶⁶ From this standpoint, the Church’s active participation and collaboration with politics as the foremost aspect of the temporal is not only justified but necessary.

Stemming from its spiritual authority and obligation to contemplation that gives birth to action, the Church can never genuinely contribute to the welfare of man in the temporal sphere, nor be true to its nature and vocation as it was instituted to be, if it is denied “passage to the social level.”⁶⁷ To reject the Church’s efforts to take an active part in temporal affairs is to reject the Church itself – a ‘Church’ that does not take upon itself the responsibility of sanctifying temporal existence, especially a secular one, fails to live up to its being-a-Church. It must be clear on the part of the Church that the spiritual is its principal commitment, and that its power to translate it to Catholic action can only

⁶⁴ Ibid., 186, 101.

⁶⁵ Rhoderick John S. Abellanosa, “The CBCP and Philippine Politics: 2005 and After,” *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review* Vol. 8, No. 1 (2008): 77.

⁶⁶ Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* n. 165, 62.

⁶⁷ Maritain, *Scholasticism and Politics*, 192.

come about as a fruit of contemplation – *nemo dat quod non habet*. In this way, the Church does not only fulfill its vocation but also overcomes the dichotomy that rejected Christianity’s dedication to the world. Through Catholic action, there is now no “portion of...life and activity, and especially perhaps in the social domain, which does not arise from Christianity and is not animated by it,” so much so that even if political action is not directly within its power, it has been responsible in the latter’s being “formed, enlightened, prepared.”⁶⁸

Conclusion

Despite the valuable insights culled out and interpreted from the scrutiny and reflection of Maritain, it must be admitted that this work barely scratches the intricacies that concern the Church and State relations. Although not new, the prospects of understanding the Church’s actions in recent times, apart from the technicalities of the law, and of promoting a scholastic approach to this dynamic are worthy of being revisited and adapted to our situation. The observation that Maritain’s thoughts are still applicable and relevant to our views today, regardless of their context in the previous century, does not come as a surprise because the scholastic method is fit for the attempts of constructing bridges and creating syntheses between seemingly conflicting sides, even in the face of criticisms of rigidity and outdatedness. Regarding our considerations for democracy, even when false narratives and attempts to discredit its value for our nation abound, its ordination towards the common good along the pathway of genuine freedom must be reasserted, now more than ever, especially when the events of the past few years posed serious threats to our social and moral valuation for the ‘person’ who possesses the inalienable human dignity and the inviolable sanctity of rights. Maritain’s predilection for an organic

⁶⁸ Ibid. 197-8, 199.

and personalist democracy, therefore, cannot be underestimated and must become the subject of further explorations in this area.

As for the notions of authority and Catholic action, they are inextricably bound and are mutually necessitating in view of the Church's exercise of its activities, regardless of the spheres adumbrated above. The authority that the Church possesses in its presence and action, from the spiritual and contemplative down to the material, temporal, and secular, is not something granted to it; it is essential to its nature without which it ceases to be what it is. An exclusively 'spiritual' 'Church' is not a Church at all, nor an impressively helpful and materially prosperous 'Church,' such. Suffice it to say that Catholic action is nothing but the Church's obedience to its Master's final bidding to "go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature"⁶⁹ – the Church, through this action, "does not cease to proclaim through its authorized organs... an essentially Christian state of mind."⁷⁰

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⁶⁹ Mark 16:15.

⁷⁰ Maritain, *Integral Humanism*, 269.

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