

DEMOCRACY AND THEOLOGY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS ON APPROPRIATION

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Abstract

To what extent have the Christian thinkers of this age made the proper appropriation of democratic components—voting rule or will of the majority in decision making, individual liberty, freedom of speech/press, equality, rule of law, equal rights, the ignoring of hereditary class distinctions, tolerance of minority views and participatory or collaborative nature of governing—in different theological fields and in Church teachings? This is the main focus of this article. In this regard, this article makes a critical evaluation on those earlier contributions in assimilating the democratic components in theological fields, etc. It also points out the possible challenges in appropriating democracy in theological endeavours today. In addition, this article unveils the original meaning of the term democracy which will accelerate the attempt to make possible ways of appropriating the democratic prepositions (*of, by and for*) in theological conversations and actions. Such a theology then would be a profound theology that initiates us toward a democracy ordered in a way that accords with

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God's law and purposes. Besides, the typical nature of such theology would be purely based on the contextual, celebrational and ethical life of the Faithful.

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Introduction

Taking into account the world-view of the Christian community, theologians continuously make several attempts to rethink the methods of theological reflections.¹ In such theological endeavours, they call their attempts as local theology, public theology, contextual theology, inculturation, and so on. Here, they, in special manner, sharpen their theological reflections at the service of the day-to-day experiences of the faithful living in completely different cultural milieus, even in the democratic nations. Due to the cultural variety of human imaginings, there were many contributions in assimilating the democratic components in different theological fields like eco-theology, political theology, public theology, practical theology, systematic theology, feminist theology, entertainment theology, etc.²

¹ Mathijs Lamberigts, "Religious Freedom, Interreligious Dialogue, and the Engagement of the Church in Today's World: Coping with the Challenges," *Encounter: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Reflections of Faith and Life* 9, 01 (2018) 8-19; P.T. Matthew, "From Apologetics to Public Theology: Milestones and Pointers," *Encounter: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Reflections of Faith and Life* 9, 01 (2018) 40-56; Stephan Van Erp, "Living with the Hidden God: Sacramental Theology as Public Theology," *Encounter: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Reflections of Faith and Life* 9, 01 (2018) 20-39.

²See in this respect, John Dewey, *A Common Faith*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934; Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness: A Vindication of Democracy and Critique of Its Traditional Defense*, New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944; Leo-Joseph Suenens, *Co-responsibility in the Church*, New York, NY: Herder & Herder, 1968; Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. I, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1981; Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982; John H. Yoder, "The Hermeneutics of Peoplehood," in *The Priestly Kingdom*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985, 15-36; Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. II, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1985; Claude Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society*, Boston, MA: MIT Press, 1986; James Luther Adams, "Mediating Structures," in J. Ronald Engel, ed., *Voluntary Associations: Socio-cultural Analyses and Theological Interpretation*, Chicago: Exploration Press, 1986; John Dewey, *Art of Experience*, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989; Malusi M. Mpumlwana, "The Road to Democracy: The Role of Contextual Theology," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 85, D (1993) 5-18; Daniel Elazar, *The Covenant Tradition in Politics*, 4 vols., New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1995; Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Do Christians Have Good Reasons for Supporting Liberal Democracy?," *The Modern Schoolman*, 78, 01 (2001) 229-248; Robert P.

The main consideration of these different Christian thinkers initiate a needful critical evaluation: to what extent have they made the proper appropriation of democratic significations in different theological fields and in Church teachings? This is the main focus of this article. The proposed critical evaluation begins with an in-depth study of the original meaning of the term democracy.³ Basing on it, we critically

Kraynak, *Christian Faith and Modern Democracy: God and Politics in the Fallen World*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001; John Milbank, "The Last of the Last: Theology, Authority and Democracy," *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 58, 2 (2002) 271-298; Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004; Romand Coles, "Democracy, Theology, and the Question of Excess: A Review of Jeffrey Stout's *Democracy & Tradition*," *Modern Theology* 21, 02 (2005) 301-321; Max L. Stackhouse, "Public Theology and Democracy's Future," *Society* 42, 03 (2005) 7-11; Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Jeffrey Stout on Democracy and Its Contemporary Christian Critics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33, 04 (2005) 633-647; Claude Lefort, "The Permanence of the Theologico-Political," in *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*, ed., Hent de Vries and Lawrence Sullivan, New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2006, 153-187; Robert Talisse, *A Pragmatist Philosophy of Democracy*, New York and London: Routledge, 2007; Robert McClory, *As It Was in the Beginning: The Coming Democratization of the Catholic Church*, New York, NY: Crossroad, 2007; Barry Taylor, *Entertainment Theology: New Edge Spirituality in a Digital Democracy*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008; Edward Foley, "Engaging Liturgy of the World: Worship as Public Theology," *Studia Liturgica* 38 (2008) 31-52; Jared Hickman, "The Theology of Democracy," *The New England Quarterly* 81, 2 (2008), 177-217; Lyn Miller, "What Has Divinity to Do with Democracy? Metaphysics, Transcendence, and Critical Theology of Liberation," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 25, 01 (2009) 65-83; Corey D.B. Walker, "Theology and Democratic Futures," *Political Theology* 10, 02 (2009) 199-208; Michael L. Raposa, "Pragmatism, Democracy and the Future of Catholic Theology," *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy* 30, 03 (2009) 288-302; Carlo Invernizzi Accetti, "Can Democracy Emancipate Itself from Political Theology? Habermas and Lefort on the Permanence of the Theologico-Political," *Constellations* 17, 02 (2010) 254-270; Ronald J. Engel, "Democracy, Christianity, Ecology: A Twenty-First-Century Agenda for Eco-theology," *Cross Currents* 61, 02 (2011) 217-231; Edward Foley, "Eucharist, Postcolonial Theory and Developmental Disabilities: A Practical Theologian Revisits the Jesus Table," *International Journal of Practical Theology* 15, 01 (2011) 57-73; Nicholas Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship: An Exploration of Liturgical Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015; James K.A. Smith, *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017; and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Acting Liturgically: Philosophical Reflections on Religious Practice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

³I mainly rely on the recent researches on the original meaning of democracy. See in this respect, Žiga Vodovnik, "Lost in Translation: The Original Meaning of Democracy," *Teorija in Praksa* 54, 1 (2017) 38-54; Mogens Herman Hansen, "The Concepts of Demos, Ekklesia, and Dikasterion in Classical Athens," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 50 (2010) 499-536; Josiah Ober, "The Original Meaning of 'Democracy': Capacity to Do Things, not Majority Rule," *Constellations* 15, 01 (2008) 1-9; and Josiah Ober, "'I Besieged That Man': Democracy's Revolutionary Start," in *Origins of Democracy in Ancient Greece*, Kurt A. Raaflaub, Josiah Ober, and Robert W. Wallace, with chapters by Paul Cartledge and Cynthia Farrar, Berkeley, London and Los Angeles: University Press of California, 2007, 83-104.

evaluate the earlier appropriations of democracy in theological fields. Thereby we point out the possible challenges in appropriating democracy in theological endeavours today. Finally, we attempt to make a possible way of appropriating the democratic prepositions in theological conversations.

1. Search into the Original Meaning of Democracy

Different people understand the term *democracy* in different ways. As it is given in the *Oxford Talking Dictionary*, it is a form of government by the people (by the elected representatives) in whom the power to rule is resided. Such a democratic government or society favours equal rights, the ignoring of hereditary class distinctions, and tolerance of minority views.⁴ In this democratic system one might notice the following democratic components like voting rule or will of the majority in decision making, individual liberty, freedom of speech/press, equality, rule of law, and participatory or collaborative nature of governing. As Nabaz Shwany claims,

All in all, the democratic system is about decision making and people participating in governing. It has components like collective decision, electoral participations, political pluralism, multi party system, minority rights, free markets, individual liberties, freedom of speech and organizational rights.⁵

All the aforementioned components of democratic system would lead one to argue that in the first instance, definition of democracy and its components seem to be reductive. It is in the sense that democracy is the power of the people by means of a voting rule for determining the will of the majority. This reductive sense, as Josiah Ober claims, “leaves democracy vulnerable to well-known social choice dilemmas” and eludes “much of the value and potential of democracy.”⁶ It is at this juncture, I deliberately intend to reinterpret the term democracy from its etymological meanings.

In my search into the original meaning of democracy I mainly rely on Josiah Ober who made a considerable study on this matter.⁷ *Demokratia* (δημοκρατία) is the Greek term for democracy. It is a composite of two words *demos* and *kratos*. Here *demos* denote “the

⁴“democracy,” in *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, ed. A. P. Cowie, Delhi: S. K. Mookerjee, Oxford University Press, Indian Edition, 1991, 319.

⁵ Nabaz Shwany, “The Principles of Democratic and Non-Democratic Government,” posted on November 18, 2009 and available at: <http://www.kurdishaspect.com/doc111809NS.html> (accessed on 25-02-2012).

⁶Ober, “The Original Meaning of ‘Democracy,’” 1.

⁷For a detailed study see, Raaflaub, Ober, and Wallace, *Origins of Democracy in Ancient Greece*.

people” and *kratos* refers to “power.” According to this etymological meaning, democracy is primarily understood as “the power of the people.” However, “*demokratia* is not in the first instance concerned with ‘number’. The term *demos* refer to a collective body.”⁸ In other words, “democracy never actually meant the rule of the people, but was born as a word referring to the power or capacity (*kratos*) of the people (*dēmos*).”⁹

Considering the original Greek meaning of ‘democracy’ in the context of the classical Greek terminology for regime-types, Josiah Ober argues that unlike *monarchia* and *oligarchia*, *demokratia* cannot mean that the “*demos* monopolizes the offices.”¹⁰ The author continues to claim that “Unlike *arche*, the word *kratos* is never used of ‘office’. *Kratos* has a root meaning of ‘power’ –but Greek linguistic usage of the noun *kratos* and its verbal forms ranges widely across the power spectrum, from ‘domination’ to ‘rule’ to ‘capacity.’”¹¹

On the one hand, the term *demos* refer “to a corporate body –to a ‘public’ –and that public cannot collectively be an ‘office-holder’ in the ordinary sense.”¹² Put it succinctly, *demokratia* is not just “the power of the *demos*,” rather, more capaciously, “the empowered *demos*,” in which “the *demos* gains a collective capacity to effect change in the public realm. And so, it is not just a matter of *control* of a public realm but the collective *strength* and *ability* to act within that realm and, indeed, to reconstitute the public realm through action.”¹³ On the other, the term *kratos* used as a regime-type suffix, “becomes power in the sense of strength, enablement, or ‘capacity to do things.’”¹⁴ As a result, democracy as a composite of *demos* and *kratos*, originally refers to “the collective capacity of a public to make good

⁸Ober, “The Original Meaning of ‘Democracy,’” 1-2.

⁹Vodovnik, “The Original Meaning of Democracy,” 43.

¹⁰Ober, “The Original Meaning of ‘Democracy,’” 7. As the author explains, the Greek vocabularies for political regimes are *monarchia* (rule of the one), *oligarchia* (rule of the few/the limited number of the persons) and *demokratia* (rule of the many). Here *monarchia* comes from *monos* meaning solitary and *arche* meaning rule, monopoly of office, empire. *Oligarchia* is a composite of *hoi oligoi* meaning the few and *arche*. *Demokratia* comes from *demos* meaning the people and *kratos* meaning power [1-2].

¹¹Ober, “The Original Meaning of ‘Democracy,’” 6. Recently, Žiga Vodovnik, by identifying the dissonance between the original meaning of the term democracy and its understanding today, claimed that democracy actually never meant the rule (*archos*) of the people, but was born as an idea foregrounding the power or the capacity (*kratos*) of the people (*dēmos*). See, Vodovnik, “The Original Meaning of Democracy,” 38-54.

¹²Ober, “The Original Meaning of ‘Democracy,’” 7.

¹³Ober, “The Original Meaning of ‘Democracy,’” 7.

¹⁴Ober, “The Original Meaning of ‘Democracy,’” 6.

things happen in the public realm.”¹⁵ This definition surpasses the reductive definition of democracy as the power of the people by the majority rule. Put it succinctly, the original meaning of democracy as the collective capacity to do things for the benefit of others publicly is a catalyst in a healthy conversation between democracy and theology today.

2. Appropriation of Democracy in Theology: A Critical Analysis

In the history of Catholic theology, was there any engagement in the theological appropriation of the concept of democracy? The components of democracy are articulated in the different fields of theology, including the Second Vatican Council’s documents and Social Teachings of the Catholic Church. Therefore, it is high time to make an in-depth study on the earlier contributions in assimilating the democratic components in different theological fields.

2.1. Theological Appropriation of Democracy as an Organic Development

It is to be noted that theological appropriation of democracy is to be understood as an organic development within the Church and her doctrines, especially in both theological and pastoral orientations. In this regard, Michael L. Raposa’s observation is very significant to note. In line with Robert McClory, Raposa argues that

Beginning with the radically communitarian practices established by Jesus and his earliest disciples, and recurring at decisive moments when the Church appealed to the *sensus fidelium* or the *consensus fidelium* in formulating doctrinal positions, these democratic elements are discernible to the careful observer.¹⁶

In addition, the author continues to say that “from the end of the nineteenth century throughout the twentieth and extending into the twenty-first, most of official Roman Catholic discourse concerning democracy has appeared increasingly positive.”¹⁷ This significant and positive relation between Christianity and democracy is well enumerated in the following argument by Ronald Engel:

Democracy is as deeply indebted to the Hebrew prophetic tradition, from Moses to Isaiah to Jesus of Nazareth, as it is to the Greek. It is from the biblical prophetic tradition that democracy derives its positive valuation

¹⁵Ober, “The Original Meaning of ‘Democracy,’” 8.

¹⁶Raposa, “Pragmatism, Democracy and the Future,” 298. See also, Robert McClory, *As It Was in the Beginning: The Coming Democratization of the Catholic Church*, New York, NY: Crossroad, 2007, 121-123.

¹⁷Raposa, “Pragmatism, Democracy and the Future,” 296.

of history and its goal of future social salvation. The Christian faith has given democracy some of its most powerful spiritual affirmations: the sanctity and equality of the individual, even the least, the notion of the free working of the Holy Spirit in open and respectful dialogue, the idea of covenant that Roger Williams renamed “democratic.”¹⁸

In addition, as Jeffrey Stout claimed, the commensurability and compatibility between democracy and Christianity can be described in this manner: “both draw on tradition for formative practices that inculcate virtue, both inhabit a similar ‘space’ and ‘time,’ and both share practical interests (e.g., in a neighborhood).”¹⁹

2.2. Democratic Values as Essentially Religious in Character

Looking back to the documents of the Second Vatican Council, it can be argued that the value of democracy is highlighted in an eminent way as it is “grounded in principles that are essentially religious in character.”²⁰ Succinctly it can be said that democracy has its religious root. As Raposa claims,

Vatican II’s call for the renewal of the laity within the Church, and its recurring portrayal of the Church as the pilgrim “People of God,” combined with its appeal for the promotion of real ecumenical dialogue with persons of different faiths outside the church, marked a watershed moment in Catholic history. Whatever the language used, the result, indeed, was a kind of democratizing of Roman Catholicism, one clearly influenced by the Church’s positive encounter with democratic regimes in nation states where the Catholic faithful enjoyed freedom and prosperity.²¹

In his commentary on the Second Vatican Council documents, Archbishop Leo-Joseph Suenens of Belgium affirmed that the Council “certainly was characterized by a move in the direction of democratization” and this movement was an “undeniable process of

¹⁸ Engel, “Democracy, Christianity, Ecology,” 225. See, Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982; James Luther Adams, “Mediating Structures,” in J. Ronald Engel, ed., *Voluntary Associations*; Daniel Elazar, *The Covenant Tradition in Politics*, 4 vols., New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1995.

¹⁹Smith, *Awaiting the King*, 41. See also, Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 98-100, 158; James K.A. Smith, “The Reformed (Transformationist) View,” in *Five Views on the Church and the Politics*, ed. Amy E. Black, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015, 139-162; Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*, New York: Vintage, 2012; and James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic a Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2009.

²⁰Raposa, “Pragmatism, Democracy and the Future,” 296. See also, McClory, *As It Was in the Beginning*, 121-123.

²¹Raposa, “Pragmatism, Democracy and the Future,” 297.

osmosis and imitation between the manner of ruling in the secular world and in the Church."²²

However, in the theological conversations held at the Second Vatican Council, the term democracy is not heard. Instead, a familiar terms like "collegiality," and "represent" came up in those theological conversations. So to say, these terminologies highlight the democratic nature in the sense of "the practice of empowering persons by giving them a 'voice' (rather than a 'vote') in that conversation."²³ As Raposa puts it succinctly, "the official Catholic rhetoric about democracy has been decidedly more positive than its treatment of pragmatism."²⁴ This does not imply that the Catholic Church itself is a democratic institution. However, "its prescription for doing theology has not been one that emphasizes the ideal of an open and democratic conversation."²⁵ Just as in a genuinely democratic conversation, "each reasonable person has a role and a voice,"²⁶ so it also be in the theological conversation.

2.3. Democratic Signification of Christian Faith as Contextual

While addressing at the Annual General Meeting of the Institute of Contextual Theology, in South Africa, M. Malusi Mpumlwana explains what contextual theology really means. Accordingly, it is a "conscious attempt to do theology from within the context of real life in the world." The two essential ingredients in doing contextual theology, as Mpmulwana claims, are "Christian faith and a consciousness of the life reality that is experienced."²⁷ Accordingly, such a combination of faith with life experience "means that contextual theology is the *liberation of theology*. It liberates theology that it becomes the common and everyday tool of any and every Christian, and that makes it a people's theology, a democratic theology."²⁸ This theologizing process is made "on the basis of a combination of *life experience* and a *living faith*, rather than on the basis of predominant academic knowledge."²⁹ As a result, within the Church there are different contextual theologies like Black Theology, Liberation Theology, Feminist Theology, and so on.

²²Suenens, *Co-responsibility in the Church*, 189 and 191. See, Raposa, "Pragmatism, Democracy and the Future," 297.

²³Raposa, "Pragmatism, Democracy and the Future," 297.

²⁴Raposa, "Pragmatism, Democracy and the Future," 288.

²⁵Raposa, "Pragmatism, Democracy and the Future," 288.

²⁶Raposa, "Pragmatism, Democracy and the Future," 301.

²⁷Mpumlwana, "The Road to Democracy," 7.

²⁸Mpumlwana, "The Road to Democracy," 7.

²⁹Mpumlwana, "The Road to Democracy," 6.

2.4. Democratic Significations Demand a Cultural Discernment

In the process of appropriating democratic components in doing theology contextually what is important is a cultural discernment. It is “possible only by a competent analysis and critique both of tradition and of modernity. While modernization reveals to us some important aspects of our existence, our tradition has some deeply human and therefore very precious features.”³⁰ In this manner we have to understand cultural discernment as awareness. In the encyclical *Fides et Ratio*,³¹ Pope John Paul II exhorts us that, “Cultural context permits the living of Christian faith, which contributes in turn little by little to shaping that context. To every culture Christians bring the unchanging truth of God which he reveals in the history and culture of a people” (FR, no. 71). This calls for the symbiosis between faith and the culture which would enhance the faith-expressions of the Faithful received from generation to generation in relation with the context in which the Faithful live. That implies that only through a proper cultural discernment we can have a contextualized theology. Then it would help us to restructure, revise, and formulate better theological expressions by making use of cultural signs and symbols. Therefore, as Max L. Stackhouse claims, “A profound theology will press us toward a democracy ordered in a way that accords with God’s law and purposes. That poses the critical issues.”³²

2.5. Mutual Distrust among Democracy and Christianity

However, in the process of appropriating democratic components in theology, one may find mutual distrust among democracy and Christianity. The reasons for mutual distrust are the “loss of theological and moral depth,” the “reliance by Christians upon supernatural revelation,” the separation between personal and church-centred salvation and the salvation of society as a whole, the neglect of “the unique spiritual character of human beings” and the “lack of concern for social justice.”³³ Despite these reasons for the mutual distrust between democracy and Christianity, their fundamental interdependence is to be taken into account in theologizing process. In this regard Ronald Engel’s claim for a

³⁰Subash Anand, “Inculturation in India: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow,” *Indian Missiological Review* 19, 01 (1997) 28-29.

³¹Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_15101998_fides-et-ratio_en.html [accessed on 10-10-2020].

³²Stackhouse, “Public Theology and Democracy’s Future,” 10.

³³Engel, “Democracy, Christianity, Ecology,” 223-225.

renewed and deepened democratic religious culture is praiseworthy. Such culture lies in the web of fundamental interdependence between democracy, Christianity and theology seen in history.³⁴

2.6. Developing a Democratic Culture in Theology

As Lyn Miller claims, “democracy and divinity may not be equivalent,” since the “transcendence is inherent in the radical democratic ethos of the *ekklēsia*.”³⁵ But, Cornel West argues that “democracy and social concern are indispensable to any notion or practice of divine life.” In addition, for him, “democracy is not an end but a means—a means to ‘the flowering of individuality.’”³⁶ This might be understood in terms of developing a democratic culture in theology.

While speaking of the democratic culture, Jeffrey Stout clearly explains what democracy means:

The background of material inferential properties, the expressive resources for making norms explicit, and the practice of exchanging reasons and requests for reasons with fellow citizens are, taken together, the discursive core of democratic culture. Democracy, far from being a freestanding set of institutional arrangements and abstract norms essentially opposed to culture, is a culture in its own right. Democratic norms are its expressive fruition. As a culture in its own right, democracy is also a tradition.³⁷

That is to say, in line with Jeffrey Stout, Romand Coles describes democracy “as a tradition deeply and self-consciously aware of the importance of cultivating individual character rooted in the virtues of piety, hope, ‘love or generosity.’”³⁸ It is in this context that Coles considers John Howard Yoder’s radical reformation theology as “radically democratic—in the temporal as well as the directly ethical-political sense of the term.”³⁹ In other words, the term democracy

³⁴Engel, “Democracy, Christianity, Ecology,” 228-229.

³⁵Miller, “What Has Divinity to Do with Democracy?” 67.

³⁶Cornel West, *Prophetic Thought in Postmodern Times*, Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1993, 63. See also, Miller, “What Has Divinity to Do with Democracy?” 74-75.

³⁷Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 195. See also, Wolterstorff, “Jeffrey Stout on Democracy,” 635.

³⁸Coles, “Democracy, Theology, and the Question of Excess,” 303. See also, Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 9-10.

³⁹Coles, “Democracy, Theology, and the Question of Excess,” 315. See also, John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel*, Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1984, 5, where we read: “Any existing Church is not only fallible but in fact peccable. That is why there needs to be a constant potential for reformation and in the more dramatic situations a readiness for the reformation even to be ‘radical.’”

really means what it holds in its Greek root meaning as the collective capacity to do things in public for the benefit of the people.

2.7. Democracy Emancipates Political Theology

The concept of democracy has also its theological appropriation in political theology. In this regard, the attempts by Jürgen Habermas and Claude Lefort are very significant. As Carlo Invernizzi Accetti presents, on the one hand, Habermas “develops a conception of democracy articulated around the notion of ‘communicative rationality,’” on the other, Lefort “delineates a conception of democracy articulated around the notion of an ‘empty place of power.’”⁴⁰ By presenting these views, Accetti describes how democracy can emancipate itself from political theology. For Habermas,

Only in and through communicative action can the energies of social solidarity attached to religious symbolism branch out and be imparted, in the form of moral authority, both to institutions and to persons... neither science nor art can inherit the mantle of religion, only a morality, set communicatively allow into a discourse ethics, can replace the authority of the sacred.⁴¹

This is the core of the notion of democracy in relation with communicative rationality in political theology. For Habermas, this conception is profoundly teleological in the sense of his philosophy of history in which *teleo* is the principal element.⁴²

Meanwhile, modern democracy is “a form of society in which ‘the place of power is represented as an empty place’” and this place of power “‘manifests society’s self-externality.’”⁴³ Here, for Accetti, the ‘empty place’ is “the organizing principle that gives a distinctive form to society.”⁴⁴ As Lefort puts it succinctly, in modern democratic

⁴⁰Accetti, “Can Democracy Emancipate Itself from Political Theology?” 254. For a detailed study on communicative rationality, see, Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. I, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1981; *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. II, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1985. Regarding Claude Lefort view on democracy, see, Claude Lefort, *The Political Forms of Modern Society; “The Permanence of the Theologico-Political,”* 153-187.

⁴¹Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. II, 92.

⁴²Cf. Accetti, “Can Democracy Emancipate Itself from Political Theology?” 257. As Accetti claims, “Habermas’ notion of communicative rationality is organized around the figure of an ‘ideal speech situation.’” This notion of ‘ideal speech situation’ includes “a set of conditions that must necessarily be presupposed by the universal pragmatics of language itself.” However, Habermas is well aware that, such an ‘ideal speech situation’ is never realized in practice” [259].

⁴³Accetti, “Can Democracy Emancipate Itself from Political Theology?” 261-262. See, Lefort, “The Permanence of the Theologico-Political,” 153-159.

⁴⁴Accetti, “Can Democracy Emancipate Itself from Political Theology?” 263.

society “power always makes a gesture towards something *outside*,” and it “defines itself in terms of that outside.”⁴⁵ This understanding of democracy leaves it into its reductive definition of the power of the majority rule which accentuates dilemmas in the theological field, especially in the case of political theology. The political theology has to surpass this reductive definition of democracy with its Greek root meaning, it would have been better understood in its democratic signification.

2.8. Act of Democratization as the Contribution of Entertainment Theology

As Barry Taylor understands, the term democratization is “a term that attempts to capture the trend towards a less hierarchical and authoritarian exchange of ideas, ethics, information, and just about everything else in contemporary society.”⁴⁶ Moreover, this democratization process, for Taylor, is “at work in virtually every area of life.”⁴⁷ This act of democratization in the life is to be pursued by the theologians of today for a better appropriation of democratic components in theological field.

2.9. Democratic Significations in Understanding the Sacraments as Social Process

After having extensively described how different Christian thinkers and theologians have been challenged while being engaged in a theological appropriation of democracy, it is quite normal to ask: was there any such attempt in Sacramental Theology? “Yes” can be the answer. This attempt seems to be a renewed way of looking at the sacraments from their democratic components.

While discussing the condition necessary for the evangelization of Christian rites, Louis-Marie Chauvet claims that “we must honor certain values of our post-modern society. We are thinking in particular of the values of democracy dear to our contemporaries.”⁴⁸ Precisely to say, incorporating the values of democracy in the liturgies would be much helpful for a better sharing of collective capacity than power in the liturgy. While incorporating the values of democracy, Louis-Marie Chauvet, French sacramental theologian, expresses his hesitation towards the increasing uncomfotability in

⁴⁵Lefort, “The Permanence of the Theologico-Political,” 157.

⁴⁶Barry Taylor, *Entertainment Theology: New Edge Spirituality in a Digital Democracy*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008, 1.

⁴⁷Taylor, *Entertainment Theology*, 1.

⁴⁸Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body*, trans. Madeleine Beaumont, Collegetown, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001, 112-113.

sharing the power in liturgies. The power remains quasi exclusively in the hands of clerics or of some laypersons, at times more clerical than the clerics themselves. The “power remains quasi exclusively in the hands of clerics (or of some laypersons, at times more clerical than the clerics themselves).”⁴⁹ However, the term democracy has to be considered within the background of its Greek root meaning, not as power of the majority rule but as capacity to do things for the benefit of the faithful.

The sacraments are themselves democratic with the capacity to do things for the benefit of the faithful in the Church. In this sense, sacraments are the democratic actions “by the Church,” and “for the Church” (CCC no. 1118).⁵⁰ Here we have to affirm the fact that they are *of* the Church, instituted *by* the Church, performed ultimately *for* the Church – the People of God and the Mystical Body of Christ. This is clearly expressed in *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*: sacraments are the visible signs to communicate the Mystery of Christ; they are for the sanctification of the people by the power of the Holy Spirit; they make the faithful true worshipers of God the Father; they insert the faithful into the Church, the Body of Christ; therefore, the Church is bound to dispense sacraments for the benefit of the faithful (cf. CCEO can. 667).⁵¹

As it is understood, democracy is the collective capacity to do things happens in the public realm. Considering this original meaning of democracy, sacraments have the collective capacity to perform things for the benefit of the faithful in the Church. This collective capacity is empowered by the Holy Spirit within the liturgical assembly through the ritual participation in the dispensation of Christ’s Paschal Mystery. It is a process of journey in faith in view of being and becoming Christian. Thus the sacraments can be described as the public acts *of* the Church, *by* the Church and *for* the Church.⁵²

⁴⁹Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 113.

⁵⁰According to *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the sacraments are of the Church in a double sense. They are “by the Church, for she is the sacrament of Christ’s action at work in her through the mission of the Holy Spirit. They are “for the Church” in the sense that “the sacraments make the Church” (CCC no. 1118).

⁵¹ *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, Latin-English Edition, Translation Prepared under the Auspices of the Canon Law Society of America, Kottayam, India: OIRSI, reprint 1992.

⁵²For a detailed study, see my unpublished paper entitled “A New Vista for Sacramental Theology? A Democratic Perspective,” which was presented in the Research Unit of Systematic Theology and the Study of Religion in the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, KU Leuven, Belgium on 17 May 2019 under the

2.10. Democracy as a Catalyst in the Process of Deification

In line with Nicholas of Cusa, John Milbank claims that democracy is not “a compromise for here and now: it is that it can only finally arrive in the perfection of *concordantia* as deification. To eternalize democracy, and maintain its link with excellence rather than the mutual consensus of baseness, deification as the doctrine of the offer of equality with God is required.”⁵³ That is to say, democracy is here understood as a catalyst in the process of deification by means of mutual consensus. In this Cusanus perspective, democracy can play a role of mediation which indicates human participation in the Trinitarian consensus and in the process of divine creative power or *creatio continua*.⁵⁴ This attempt might be a recovery of the pre-1300 vision as well as an acknowledgement of human consensus, cooperation and varied free poetic power. Such vision did not fully envisage. There is urgency to supplement this high medievalism with Christian socialism in its widest sense. Here lies the task of the theologian.⁵⁵

2.11. Role of Democracy in Shaping the Future Task of Catholic Theology

As Corey D.B. Walker puts it, when a theologian engages “in a vigorous and wide-ranging conversation between theology and theologically inspired forms of critical thought,”⁵⁶ theologian has to take into account “the possible futures of democracy as an idea(l) and as a political practice.”⁵⁷ Thereby, in this theological engagement, as Reinhold Niebuhr claims, “Man’s capacity for justice makes democracy possible; man’s inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.”⁵⁸ This might be understood as a positive reply to the question of being “responsible for the loss of the moral and spiritual content of the democratic ideal in Western society.”⁵⁹

guidance of Prof. Joris Geldhof. In this regard see also the Sixth Chapter, Section 4 (Elements for a Renewed Sacramental Theology of the Syro-Malabar Church) of my doctoral dissertation entitled *A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Syro-Malabar Christian Identity in Dialogue with Louis-Marie Chauvet*, Leuven: Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, 2013, 367-380.

⁵³Milbank, “The Last of the Last,” 294.

⁵⁴Milbank, “The Last of the Last,” 297. See, Nicholas of Cusa, *Selected Spiritual Writings*, trans. H. Lawrence Bond, New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1997.

⁵⁵Milbank, “The Last of the Last,” 298.

⁵⁶Walker, “Theology and Democratic Futures,” 202.

⁵⁷Walker, “Theology and Democratic Futures,” 202.

⁵⁸Niebuhr, *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, xiii. See Engel, “Democracy, Christianity, Ecology,” 222.

⁵⁹Engel, “Democracy, Christianity, Ecology,” 222.

Here the future task of Catholic theology is “continuously to formulate those rules and to shape its own practice, as well as the various sacramental, ethical, political and social practices that characterize the Catholic way of life.”⁶⁰ Then such a theology might be called as a democratized theology. In this context, Corey D.B. Walker’s dictum is praiseworthy: “to think theology is to think democracy, albeit with a more profound and humbling sense of contingency and without guarantees.”⁶¹ In this regard, the Catholic argument in favour of such democratized theology, as Raposa claims, can be “both pragmatic and personalist, then: this is the shape that love takes, an honest, open and attentive exchange between persons committed to the truth.” For instance, the ideal love is “embodied in the democratic, eternally ongoing, mutual conversation that constitutes the perfect community of the Trinity.”⁶²

3. Challenges of Theological Appropriation of Democracy

In the following, some of the difficulties or aspirations in appropriating the concept of democracy theologically are described.

3.1. Democracy not an Ideal Label for Theological Conversation

Being a political term, democracy is widely used “to designate a form of government that emphasizes social equality and significant decision making by the people governed.”⁶³ Therefore, as Raposa claims, the term democracy “actually may not be the ideal label for the sort of conversation that theology requires—after all, theology is a form of inquiry and not a political process.”⁶⁴ That is to say, “the positive discourse within the Catholic tradition about democracy as a form of government is an asset for understanding how Catholic theological practices might themselves be transformed.”⁶⁵ However, in *Fides et Ratio*, Pope John Paul II links pragmatism to “a concept of democracy which is not grounded upon any reference to unchanging values” (FR, 89).

3.2. Democratic Norms or Ideals as Theological Action, not Merely as Conversation

However, while critically evaluating Jeffrey Stout’s (American pragmatic thinker) recent work *Democracy and Tradition*,⁶⁶ Nicholas Wolterstorff claimed that liberal democracy is not “a great evil,” as

⁶⁰Raposa, “Pragmatism, Democracy and the Future,” 302.

⁶¹Walker, “Theology and Democratic Futures,” 202.

⁶²Raposa, “Pragmatism, Democracy and the Future,” 302.

⁶³Raposa, “Pragmatism, Democracy and the Future,” 299.

⁶⁴Raposa, “Pragmatism, Democracy and the Future,” 299.

⁶⁵Raposa, “Pragmatism, Democracy and the Future,” 288.

⁶⁶Cf. Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004. For the review, see Coles, “Democracy, Theology, and the Question of Excess,” 301.

many prominent Christian theologians and philosophers thought.⁶⁷ Though the liberal democracy, “being secularist, committed to expunging religious voices from the public arena,”⁶⁸ as Wolterstorff regards, democracy is “a great good—a gift of God’s providential grace to humanity.”⁶⁹ In addition, democracy is, for him, “not just talking a certain way but acting a certain way—a manifestation not just of reason but of will.”⁷⁰ This implies that in the process of theologizing, those democratic norms or ideals have to be taken into consideration as theological action, but not merely as conversation. In other words, democracy’s particular significance in theology would orient us to an action for the benefit of others in the public realm.

3.3. The Fate of Theology in a Post-Theological Moment

As Corey D.B. Baker claims, “by creating a space for tracking the uncanny presence of theology as an impossible possibility for thinking and practicing more robust forms of democracy,”⁷¹ one can think of the fate of theology in a post-theological moment. In the long run, such attempt “to articulate and elaborate the conditions of possibility for new forms of life” may exhibit “a perpetual heretical character.”⁷² Therefore, in this attempt, what is required is “a careful negotiation of the master discourses of theology and democracy.”⁷³

4. A Possible Way of Appropriating Democratic Components: *Of, By and For*

A search for a possible way of appropriating democratic components is a want of time. I am mainly indebted to the prepositions (*of, for* and *by*) taken from Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address on November 19, 1863: “government of the people, by the people, for the people.”⁷⁴ These words denote the short definition of *democracy* in Lincoln’s view. To explicate this definition,

⁶⁷Wolterstorff, “Jeffrey Stout on Democracy and Its Contemporary Christian Critics,” 634 and 637. In this article, the author clearly explains the main objections to liberal democracy put forward by the Christian thinkers are that liberal democracy is “destructive of social tradition”; it has “no ethical substance”; it “destroys all tradition and virtue”; it, “being secularist, committed to expunging religious voices from the public arena.” See also, Wolterstorff, “Do Christian Have Good Reasons for Supporting Liberal Democracy?” 229-248.

⁶⁸Wolterstorff, “Jeffrey Stout on Democracy,” 634 and 637.

⁶⁹Wolterstorff, “Jeffrey Stout on Democracy,” 633.

⁷⁰Wolterstorff, “Jeffrey Stout on Democracy,” 645.

⁷¹Baker, “Theology and Democratic Futures,” 207.

⁷²Baker, “Theology and Democratic Futures,” 207.

⁷³Baker, “Theology and Democratic Futures,” 207.

⁷⁴This Text of Gettysburg Address by Abraham Lincoln is available at http://www.americaslibrary.gov/jb/civil/jb_civil_gettysbg_2.html [accessed on 10-10-2020]; <http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/gettysburg.htm>

The people are always governed by someone. In context, the phrase is an elegant way of describing self government. Lincoln was saying that the government which governed the people, was taken from the people themselves, rather than from a hereditary, aristocratic class and operated for the good of the people, rather than the benefit of someone else.⁷⁵

Having inspired by Abraham Lincoln's definition of democracy, I pose some questions front: Is theology belonging to the context of the faithful? Is theology to be celebrated? Is it right to call theology as ethical since it is meant for the benefit of the faithful? To answer these questions is quite pertinent. Seriously taking into account the *sensus fidelium* or the aspirations of the faithful, I would like to claim that theology is purely based on the contextual, celebrational and ethical life of the faithful.

The preposition 'of' has different meanings in English. One of the meanings given by the *Oxford Talking Dictionary* is in the sense of origin or source. It indicates thus a thing, place, or person from which or whom something originates, comes, or is acquired or sought. It also points to a simple possession, origin, or belonging.⁷⁶ As the preposition 'of' stands in the cognitive level, it denotes cultural rootedness as contextualization. Therefore, at the first instance we can say that theology is of the faithful and rooted in their context. Here people's theology is thoroughly contextual and concerns "most of all about how people live in practice and how to be a Christian in practice." Thus, as a contextual theology, it becomes a "tool of empowerment and liberation"⁷⁷ as well as "a faith journey in a community of faith."⁷⁸ In such a theology, Church/assembly is "the location of the historical witness of faith."⁷⁹

In a democratic system of government, the expression "by the people" gets great signification. That is to say, there "the people are the ones who have the ultimate authority to make decisions."⁸⁰ In other words, taking a lead from the original meaning of democracy, one might say that they have the collective capacity (than authority/power) to do things happen in the public field for the

[accessed on 30-04-2019]; Garry Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America*, New York, NY: Touchstone/Simon & Schuster, 1992, 191; and Wolterstorff, "Jeffrey Stout on Democracy and Its Contemporary Christian Critics," 637.

⁷⁵ Available at: <http://askville.amazon.com/real-meaning-government-people/AnswerViewer.do?requestId=3492043> [accessed on 10-10-2020].

⁷⁶ "democracy," in *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 319.

⁷⁷ Mpumlwana, "The Road to Democracy," 7.

⁷⁸ Mpumlwana, "The Road to Democracy," 15.

⁷⁹ Mpumlwana, "The Road to Democracy," 15.

⁸⁰ Available at: <http://askville.amazon.com/real-meaning-government-people/AnswerViewer.do?requestId=3492043> [accessed on 10-10-2020].

benefit of the people. Therefore, to work for the benefit of others is the prime duty of the *demos* or the people. In the theological fields, the main outcome should be focused on the benefit of the faithful and thereby those theological formulations could be celebrated whenever the faithful come together. In this sense, theology becomes celebrational.

A rightful understanding of the preposition “for” is inevitable to explore the ethical dimension of theology. In this regard, varieties of meanings given to the preposition “for” in the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* indicate purpose, result of benefiting, a service to, with the purpose of being, or on behalf of, or in favour of.⁸¹ All those meanings, in short, indicate the beneficiary purpose of the term. In this sense, the preposition “for” stands for the beneficial praxis and in the action level and is ethically oriented.

In a democratic system, each government should be for the people. But “that is not always the case. A government that is for the people will do what it can to protect the people from the things that may harm them... A government that is for the people will do things that are beneficial to the people rather than just those things that are good for those in power.”⁸² This beneficial purpose of the democratic government can be theologically applicable. Every theology should then orient towards praxis, an ethical praxis.

Conclusion

From the above discussions it can be understood that the theological appropriation of democracy is an organic development within the Church and her doctrines and theological and pastoral orientations. Besides, they facilitate the attempts to highlight the democratic significations in theological realms, especially in public theology with its two doctrinal points in relation with theology: first, humans are made in the image of God and, second, universal call to live a godly life manifested in the development of excellence in all areas of worldly life. Thus, it can be argued that the democratic prospects play a vital role in doing theology publicly. It then would be a profound theology that initiates us toward a democracy ordered in a way that accords with God’s law and purposes, and by means of cooperation, it invites the possibility of forming covenantal relationships with God, humanity and nature.

⁸¹“democracy,” in *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, 319.

⁸² Available at: <http://askville.amazon.com/real-meaning-government-people/AnswerViewer.do?requestId=3492043> [accessed on 10-10-2020].