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## Christian Involvement in Politics: Presuppositions and Resources

Underlying this presentation is the conviction that being a Christian implies being involved in politics. Politics is understood herein as the process of structuring the conduct, rights and responsibilities of the constituent members of larger inter-human collectives such as a society or state to each other and the group as a whole. My conviction is rooted in certain general presuppositions regarding the nature of the human and religion.

Social sciences have taught us to recognize that individuals become human persons only in the context of a community of other humans. To be human is to break out of one's individuality and share in some form of polity, structured inter-human relationship. The quality of how one is human depends to a large degree upon the nature of the polity that one shares in and the manner in which he/she shares. "If nothing human is foreign to a Christian," then, to be a Christian necessarily involves being involved in the dynamics of being human, i.e. being involved in structured inter-human relationships, politics. Karl Barth claims that the basic form of humanity is "co-humanity". In a rather powerful piece of theological anthropology Barth states: "Every supposed humanity which is radically different from the very first fellow-humanity is inhumanity. . . If we take away fellow-man from the picture of man, and describe the latter as a being which is alien, opposed or in casual relation to him, we have not merely given an inadequate or partially false representation of man, but described a different being altogether. There is nothing else for it."<sup>1</sup> If we accept this understanding of the human, then, the dynamics of inter-human relations, polity cannot be avoided.

Increasingly, religion itself is understood as an important dimension of being human within a social matrix. It is not, as it is at times claimed, merely something that humans do in their solitude. Much of

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1. *Church Dogmatics*, Vol- III; 2, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1960), p. 228.

the phenomenon of religion has its meaning only within structures of inter-human relations. As the anthropologist Clifford Geertz states, religion functions to provide the essential "frame of perception, symbolic screens through which experience is interpreted . . . guides for action, (and) blueprints for conduct."<sup>2</sup> A religious symbol system does so, by playing "the decisive role of providing the necessary and comprehensive synthesis between a people's ethos - the tone, character and quality of their life, their moral and aesthetic style and mood - and their world view, the picture they have of the way things in their sheer actualities are, their most comprehensive idea of order."<sup>3</sup> If religion is understood in this sense, it has a significant role in the polity of a given people. The nature of the polity of a people is shaped by the kind of the shared system of meaning that is taken to be determinative or of ultimate significance by the people. Our quest for a theological basis for Christian involvement in politics is grounded on this fundamental relation between the religious symbol system of a given society and the structure and dynamics of its polity.

The specifically Christian theological presupposition that underlies these reflections is that the shared system of meaning—the mythos, memory and hope—of the Christian community is political through and through. The Bible singularly seems to affirm that the political structure of peoples, the historical events that shape their social matrix, the economic and legal structures of their polity—all have something to do with God, the ultimate point of reference for the very being and meaning of the people. The socio-political history of the people of Israel is the locus of the reaveling and redeeming relation that Yahweh has with his people, (Deut. 26:5 ff.). That in the course of history, this people, the Christians, have twisted and come to use the original deeply politically oriented mythos and meaning patterns in privatized and a-political manner does not mitigate the political nature of the symbols.

If the sacred symbol system of the Christian social matrix is political in nature and consequently believing and behaving Christianly imply political existence, then, the discourse about such faith and practice as well as about the Source of such faith, namely God, cannot but be political as well. That is, christian theology cannot but be political

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2. "From Sine Qua Non to Cultural system," in W.H. Capps, ed., *Ways of Understanding Religion*, (New York: Macmillan, 1972), p. 185.

3. Clifford Geertz, *Ibid.* x.

theology. Therefore the criterion of Christian theology of a particular time and place cannot lay simply in its conformity to the propositions of the past or to one promulgated authoritatively as once and for all, namely dogma. But rather, the criterion is primarily to be found in the sort of politically liberating, transforming and wholesome community-constituting action that it engenders among humans in concrete contexts. One can establish that it is this type of criterion that the prophets of the Old Testament and Jesus of Nazareth used to evaluate the theologies and interpretations of their times. The community-constituting original and decisive complex of events that we call the "Christ-event" declares that God has inaugurated in Christ an authentic structure of divine polity, the kingdom of God, in which the blind see, the deaf hear, those who are taken as dead are made alive, the slaves are free and the poor and the hungry are filled. It is a structure of God—initiated inter—human relation which guarantees and maximizes the freedom, dignity, wholeness and fellowship of each and all. Therefore Christian theology in India will be political theology to the extent that it arises out of the praxis of the people of God in India in bringing about such processes of liberation at the personal and social levels in this country.

As I take it, none of us will hesitate to confess that much of Christian theology in India is not political in the sense described above. Perhaps the first act of our search for a relevant political theology in India that you and I can do and call our Christian brothers and sisters across this land to do is corporate repentance and contrition that will lead us to the resources for an authentic political existence that was manifest in Christ Jesus; that will then spur us on to commitment and concrete praxis for liberating political action. So many reasons have led the Indian Church to be often a-political. The following are some of them: mistaken understanding of the separation between the Church/religious communities and the state; belief that politics is a dirty business and the consequent fear of getting oneself "dirty", extreme forms of privatized religion and spirituality, fear and prejudice against organized protest and action, naked apathy, simple ignorance of political processes and dynamics of power, the desire for self-preservation by playing safe and the like.

Where do we go from here? What are some of the contributions of Indian theologians toward a political theology in our country? What would be some of the questions that we ought to raise and where

do we turn for the religious resources? I shall attempt to identify a few of these issues that we ought to face in our attempt to theologise politically.

It appears to me that any discussion on political structures and Christian political praxis involves at least three key areas: i. The goal of politics, or as the Aristotelian tradition would have put it, the supreme good of politics; ii. The means of politics, primarily the question of power. Max Weber defines a state primarily as "a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory."<sup>4</sup> This indicates the central role of power within any structure of human polity. While I am aware of the "means-end" differentiation and debate among political theorists, I take these two as two crucial issues for any Christian theologising politically as well. iii. Resources for Church's involvement in political praxis. These three issues will form the basic structure of the present discussion in this paper.

### 1. Theologising politically and the definition of the public good

All activity, particularly political activity, envisages some private or public good. As Aristotle puts it, "Every art and every investigation, and likewise every practical pursuit or undertaking, seems to aim at some good; hence it has been well said that the Good is that at which all things aim. . . the Good of man must be the end of the science of Politics."<sup>5</sup> As a community or its politicians conceive the purpose, goal or end of politics, so will the polity of that organisation or state will be. In our attempt to theologise politically, then, the first issue that we will have to face is an adequate articulation of the purpose of the human community, the public or common good that shape the political decisions in India today, evaluate them from the Christian perspective and spell out what we understand as the legitimate and humanizing political good in India today. M.M. Thomas again and again speaks of the need for developing such a vision of the good, for the development "of a new cultural ethos and a new spirituality as

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4. As cited in Gordon N. Nelson, "Theology and Politics." *Dialog VIII* (Autumn 1969), p. 249, The structure of the paper is suggested by Nelson's discussion of Weber's statement.

5. Cited in Paul Lehmann, *Ethics in a Christian Context* (London: SCM, 1963), p. 84.

foundation for the political, economic and social changes aimed at justice.”<sup>6</sup> He was convinced that without such an understanding of the good, “the understanding of the ‘human’ in the cultural and spiritual ethos,” the attempts at political revolution will not realise the goal of a participant society. In order to do this task, however, we need listen to and learn from political scientists. In recent discussions on the underlying perceptions of the public good in politics in India, one can discern at present three distinct types; each of them is highly problematic from the Christian theological perspective. A Christian political theology ought to analyse these three positions and address them. I shall not be able to do anymore than simply identifying them there due to the limited scope of this presentation. Nor am I competent to offer extensive critique.<sup>7</sup>

(i) *Achievement of interest of individuals and groups as goal*: As we look at the political scene in India today we do see several not too clearly defined ideologies, many political parties, the daily floor-crossing among our politicians, the debilitating role of tens of pressure groups with vested interests based on caste, class or region, the voting patterns of millions of individuals, and the near total control that some families or groups seem to have over the State as well as national political seem to suggest in no uncertain terms that achieving the interests of individuals and particular groups within the constraints of a democratic constitution is one of the perceptions of the “public good” in India today. Herein, “politics is viewed as oriented toward the maximization of *personal interests* within the constraints imposed by organised society. Accordingly, political process, at any level, becomes a matter of bargaining for policies designed to achieve this end.<sup>8</sup> Here, interest in the whole is absent. Each and every group strives to obtain its interests and values within the political structure. The politicians may proclaim ‘public good’; but it remains mere rhetoric. It is not very different from what Reinhold Niebuhr said about the political structure and social ideal in the US a few decades ago :

The dominant pattern of social activity in our society is that of (individual) profit-seeking. The constitution of our civilization

6. S. Chatterji (ed.), *Political Prospects in India* (Madras : CLS. 1971), p. 182.

7. Douglas Strum, “On meaning of Public good : An exploration” : *Journal of Religion*, 58 (Jan 1978), pp. 13 ff. I am indebted for the insights used in this section.

8. *Ibid*, p. 18.

was written by Adam Smith, who gave himself to the illusion that each man could be selfish without any other restraint but that which the selfishness of others offered, so that a society of selfish individuals would nevertheless create social harmony.<sup>9</sup>

Our attempt to theologise politically must include a critical analysis of the content, the extent and the underlying causes of this perception of the goal of politics in India and expose its dangerous and demonic effects upon the poor, the unorganized and the voiceless. While those like Niebuhr challenge this sort of understanding even in the affluent nations where such an understanding of the common good masquerades under the pretext of democracy, India cannot simply afford such an unmitigated pluralism of interests that does not take either the whole of the nation or the larger and weaker section of the Indian society into the process of identifying and planning for the "public" good. To theologise politically in this context is to refuse to define the human except with reference to the "co-humanity" as we saw earlier and there by to expose the demonic dangers of Individual interests.

To understand the good of the human christianity is to "begin with a faith that (man) is understood *from beyond himself*," first. A political goal that is tacitly operative in Indian politics today, namely, that which is concerned with the achievement of the interests of individuals or communities that have curved in on themselves, can be challenged only when we can adequately articulate that,

(the) self is so great and so small that its greatness cannot be contained in its smallness. It can only realize itself by being endlessly *drawn out of itself into larger ends*. The community may provisionally be the larger end. But it cannot be so ultimately. For the community is, though broader than the individual, also much closer to the necessities of nature than it. The individual must have a higher end than the community.<sup>10</sup>

Where else can this be found except in the true source of being and meaning of the human, God?

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9. *Applied Christianity*, (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), p. 70.

10. R. Niebuhr, *The Self and the Dramas of History*, (New York: Scribners, 1955), p. 220.

(ii). *The second dominant perception of the goal of politics in India seems to be formulated in response to the perception of particular needs and problems as and when they are presented by concrete situations. There is no single wholistically conceived goal but rather goals are set on pragmatic grounds and for the time being. As Strum puts it:*

The actual and detailed content of public good is transitory, subject to change as the indirect consequence of social transactions vary in kind and scope and remedies are tested for their relative satisfactoriness.<sup>11</sup>

When the political goals of a nation is defined in this pragmatic fashion, its success depends to a large extent not upon the pressure or interest groups as in the first type but upon skills and efficiency of the officials and administrative structure wherein specific problems, and the way of dealing with them are conceived and executed. At least three prerequisites must be present if this kind of a perception of the public good must succeed: (a) the public must be fully knowledgeable about and capable of articulating specific problems; (b) they must be organized very well to respond critically and creatively to problems identified and solutions proposed by officials and free to express their protest when officials do not seem to act responsibly, and (c) the officials who represent the people and act on behalf of them must be effective, dependable and accountable. I think, within the Indian political and administrative structure none of the three is adequately present at the moment and therefore a definition of public good, the actualization of which depends so much upon the procedural set up, just will not do. Furthermore from the Christian perspective, such a perception is programme-oriented than people-oriented and thereby when it tends to subordinate people to success of programmes, Christian political theology must necessarily protest. The manner in which family planning or in some cities like Bangalore slum clearance is conceived, financed and executed is a good case in point. To theologise politically in this context would imply our articulating on adequate frame-work of meaning and value that would insist upon keeping human lives human.

(iii). *The third type of definition of the goal in Indian politics is the one that takes the Indian nation or society as totality, but a totality which becomes an end in itself and not a corporate entity that*

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11. Strum, *op. cit.* p. 18.

ultimately is for the sake of concrete relationships that exist between persons that make up the whole. Nation becomes the whole that now has a status almost independent of the persons in it at any one time. Politics, therefore, are often made at the expense of individuals and groups who constitute the nation. One could argue that the proclamation of emergency in not too distant a past, the National security acts, the recent Presidential proclamation against strikes by Trade Unions represent such a preception of the national goal. On the other side, claims and policies proposed by groups such as the RSS in terms of what it consider as national integration, particularly with respect to minority institutions and freedom of religion are other illustrations. Such a perception of national goal also is demonic and in the long run will destroy the people. To theologise politically in such a context is to protest against all tendencies to absoluties the nation, even as the prophets of the Old Testament were time and again called upon to.

Is there an alternative understanding of the goal of politics? Can the Indian-Christian theologian help define, along with his/her fellow citizens an understanding of public good which is conducive to the humanizing process and a just society? What are the resources within our tradition for such a task? Attempting to answer some of these questions is part of our doing theology politically in India today.

I think that Christian theologians can develop a *relational notion of the human good* in the light of the Christian understanding of God's relation to the world and humans. In the Bible, the concept of a just political order is a relational concept. It is "covenant" that provides in the Old Testament the "context of relationship" for each and every individual and groups guaranteeing and maximising their right, dignity and freedom to be. Individual does not have either being or meaning apart form his/her standing within the covenant community. One is not reduced to an isolated atomistic individual; but at the same time the free response of each is also equally significant. A relational notion of the public good will at once be wholistic and inclusive as well as dynamic, flexible enough, for situational change.

A social interpretation of the metaphor of the body, the people of God as the body of Christ and members of one another, could be a rich resource. It is here the contributions of the Indian thinker like Śri Ramanuja who conceives the world as God's body is also of significance. Offering a full fledged understanding of a "relational"

understanding of the public good is not my purpose; nor could it be done within the scope of this paper. But calling attention to such a possibility and even necessity in the Indian political context is my concern. Such a task is urgent and resources are available within our doubly determined heritage—namely both the Judaeo-Christian and pan-Indian traditions.

## 2. Theologising politically and the means of politics as power

Reinhold Niebuhr, far more than any other Protestant thinker, realized the important role of power as a means of political ordering of society. He says that even "justice is basically dependent upon a balance of power." This is so because "whenever an individual or a group or a nation possesses undue power, and whenever this power is not checked by the possibility of criticizing it and resisting it, it grows inordinate."<sup>12</sup> The sociologist, Max Weber, sees the tremendous role of power in politics that he is tempted to describe any political structure purely in terms of power. He says, "Ultimately, one can define the modern state sociologically *only* in terms of the *specific means* peculiar to it, the use of physical force."<sup>13</sup> Hence it is important that theologians who want to do their task politically in the context of political structures in India, must be able to analyse the dynamics of power within the political structures of India, criticize it in the light of the Christian understanding of power as revealed to us in the cross, death and resurrection of Christ can help redefine power as the means that brings about wholeness in individuals and state. In such a task, I think at least the following issues must be addressed :

(i). *Recognising and articulating the significant role of power in politics*: Indian theologians must wake up to the fact that if we are concerned about the changing of the state affairs and to create a new future for the Indian people, there is no other way but influencing the power of the state. That is political involvement. Since it is only by seizing the opportunities inherent within given system of power operations that we will be able to do anything at all, we must be able to articulate the role of power in such a way that the people will be educated enough to discern the inherent opportunities.

12. *Christianity and Power Politics*, (New York: Scribners, 1940), p. 26.

13. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 78.

(ii). *Discerning the nature of power used in given political contexts.* There are both degenerative and generative use of power; power that constricts people and power that maximises freedom and creative potentials in people. We must be able to articulate rather carefully the contradictory notions of power. There is the power, or better brute force, which is linear, unilateral and often demonic; there is also the power which is relational, reciprocal and thereby often creative drawing out in humans the best that is in them as individuals and societies. One good place to start will be to meditate upon the temptation of our Lord when the devil offers the messianic mediator of God's polity, rule, a sort of power with these unilateral words; I will give it to whom I will, a power whose primary purpose is self-expansion. We should be able to expose the demonic character of such self-expansive and constricting power over against the power of God that Jesus opted for. Linear power is that which operates solely to make the other a function of one's end; it is that in which a whole people or groups of people are reduced as objects to achieve the purpose of the ruler or the ruling class. Jesus is the power of God for he is mediator of salvation, it is power unto wholeness, freedom and dignity. The power, brute force that the devil offers is that which creates inequality and unhealthy dependence. It stands for a political structure, inter-human relation, in which the increase of power for one or one class is a reduction or even suspension of freedom for others. In this sense it is oppressive power. Such a power, once released, seeks more and more of its sway, increasing concentration power, both economic and political power, in the hands of a few. There are ample illustrations of such exercise of linear power in the Indian political sense today. The Indian political theologian must be able to develop an alternate notion of power that stands over against this sort of coercive and linear power. In the light of a redefinition of power that was manifested in Jesus Christ, we must expose the demonic nature of constricting power. Some expressions of such counter-power to the power of God are already rampant in many countries leading to: (a) the withholding of the freedom and independence of the judiciary: (b) blocking of sources of information such as the press from the public and subjecting the press under the state: (c) abrogation of the freedom of the labourers and trade unions, and it kills the necessary dialogue and dialectic between state and employees: (d) hindering and at times putting an end to free discussion on issues by the people. When this happens a theologian who opts to theologise politically cannot keep quiet. M.M. Thomas, during the emergency days in India writes:

...a people who have lost their political rights tend, in the long run, to become disabled either to secure the social justice or keep what justice they have secured. They revert to be objects to be manipulated as means of exploitation or welfare or as fodder for national glory or violent revolution.

It is in this context, a full scale redefinition of power in the light of the redemptive power of God in Christ, crucified and risen, must be articulated. In the light of the redefinition, then, we shall be able to discern and mobilize the power of the powerless, the weak and the unorganized. The power of the Harijan uprisings here and there, the occasional touburst of women and the struggle of the poor and oppressed have not yet adequately become data for our theological reflection and affirmation. Unless we adequately grapple with the theological implications of the class-caste conflict, the revolt of harijans in parts of India expressed through changing of their religion etc., we will not have even begun to do political theology in the Indian context.

(iii). *The relation between a re-defined notion of power to love and justice in the Indian context must be another concern of ours.* In the Bible, as Paul Tillich demonstrates, love, power and justice are integrally related.<sup>14</sup> He says that when power is relational, that is, when it helps maximise freedom and dignity within the context of community, in brief, reunite people, "power performs the work of love". Then power as power is one with love. Relating love, power and justice, he states:

Justice is the structure of power without which power would be destructive, and it is the backbone of love without which love would be sentimental self-surrender. In both of them (power and love) it is the principle of form and measure. Formless love wastes the person who loves and abuses the person who is loved; and formless power destroys, first, other centres of power, and then itself<sup>15</sup>

It is incumbent upon those of us in India to articulate something like this in terms of our political context.

14. *Love, Power and Justice*, (New York : Oxford, 1960), passim.

15. *Political Expectation*, (New York : Harper and Row, 1971), p. 118.

(iv). *The relation between power and violence and the Christian understanding of violence are also issues for a political theology.* Particularly, as Indians with the heritage of Gandhi, we must be able to look at the option of non-violence without losing a realistic view of the presence of structural and systemic violence in the very fabric of our society. Does the ideal of self-sacrifice for the other as seen in Jesus demand obviating the necessity of conflict ?

While it is not the responsibility of a theologian to spell out in detail the strategies for political action, the theologian must be able to spell out a theological basis for handling situations of conflict and tension. While oppressive power must be resisted, reconciliation among the people involved is an essential concern of the Christian polity.

(v). I think that in our theological attempt to re-define power in the context of political structures in India, we must take a course between the triumphalism of much of the Christian history in the West and the complacent passivity that has often characterized our Indian churches hitherto. Concept of tragedy, when love, power and justice are brought together in a political theology, may be significant in Indian context. Tragedy may be an essential mark of any creative power when seen in the light of cross and resurrection of Christ.

### 3. Christian involvement in politics : Theological Resources

The Indian theologian as he re-reads the Bible and attempts to politically interpret and understand his/her heritage, will discover rich resources and pregnant possibilities within the Bible and tradition for the involvement of the community of faith in political struggles for a just society. It is the responsibility of the political theologian to articulate such resources in a way that the faithful can lay hold on them and utilize them in their concrete political praxis. In the light of the limited scope of this presentation, let me briefly identify a few of them.

(i) *The fundamental Christian affirmation is that the very mode of God's relation to God's creation is just and righteous.* Political metaphors are the dominant ones that describe God-human relation in the Bible. Even traditional metaphor of shepherd which is often interpreted in pastoral terms are political in implication. The primary purpose of God's activity in the universe is to bring about a just polity, a just structure of inter-human relation. God reigns in the polis of just peace, *Yeru-shalom*. In order that a just polity under God's rule be

established, he plays the role of the defender (redeemer) for those who are defenseless. He hears the cry of the poor (ps.9:12): clears the needy of all their troubles (Ps. 107:4), satisfies the destitute with bread, and puts lands to right distribution. God even appears in court on behalf of the victim and testifies against the oppressor (*Mal.* 3:5). In the New Testament, Jesus, the mediator of the heavenly polity, the kingdom of God, understands himself in political terms. He is the announcer of the year of liberation and the beginning of just polity, (Luke 4:18ff.): The parable of the equal wages for unequal labour in Mat. 20:1 ff. seems to suggest—as do many other passages—that God is partial and takes the side of the oppressed. These biblical heritages lead Karl Barth to state,

God always takes his stand unconditionally and passionately on this side and on this side alone: against the lofty and on behalf of the lowly; against those who already enjoy right and privilege and on behalf of those who are denied and deprived of it. . . .

As a matter of fact, from the belief in God's righteousness there follows logically a very definite political task. . . . The man who lives by faith that this is true stands under a political responsibility. . . . He cannot avoid the question of human rights. He can only will and affirm a state which is based on justice. By any other political attitude he rejects the divine justification.<sup>16</sup>

Barth is very clear about the political implications of the Christian vision of God. Christian affirmation of God cannot but lead the believer to political praxis for a just social order.

Because God is active for a social order of justice, to know God, to worship God and to love Him is to seek justice and act politically in a way all inter-human relational structures will be just. Time and again the prophets call attention of the people of God to recognize this *political responsibility*. *Jose Miranda*, a Latin American theologian, suggests that the message of the Prophet Amos in Amos 5: 21 ff. can better be summarized as: I do not want cultus but rather inter-human justice.<sup>17</sup>

16. *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. II: 1, pp. 386-87.

17. Quoted by R.M. Brown, *Theology in a New Key*, p. 93.

(ii) *The Christian understanding of the human as 'co-humanity' as we saw above is another resource that we have not yet fully discovered.* The necessarily political character of being human in the Christian understanding can be further explored in our political theology. Concept of sin within an adequate political theology will be interpreted in its corporate and systemic dimensions. Dorothee Soelle's interpretation of sin in her *Political Theology* is an excellent example of this. She says that for political theology "sinner is the collaborator. . . of a structurally founded, usually anonymous injustice. . . (and) sin would be collaboration and apathy."<sup>18</sup>

(iii) *In our search for models of political involvement and strategies for vision of a just order possible within human history, we discover that the very structure of the covenant-community, its laws, its ministries and rituals, all were intended for the purpose of a just polity.* As Deut. 15:4 puts it, all institutions of the community of faith are in order that there may be no longer any poor among you. The just society is one in which every person and property must be secure; every one will receive the fruit of his labour; even the landless serf and alien will have their share in the fruit of the land; everyone including the humblest and the alien and cattle are entitled for weekly rest; no one, however disabled, impoverished or powerless is to be oppressed or denied a fair hearing; every one must have free and full access to courts and must be given fair trial; no one may be above law, not even the king; punishment for wrong-doing shall not be excessive with the result that the culprit is dehumanized. These are only some of the elements that the frame-work of a just inter-human polity that the Biblical vision seems to place before us. A political theology that builds its notion of "public good" in the light of this vision could be highly relevant in the context of India today.

All institutions of sabbath, sabbatical year, jubilee year were established to guarantee justice for all. To be just within the context of this community is to fulfil the demands of loyalty to each other. One is righteous not because he/she fulfils every moral obligation; but rather because he/she makes the relationship whole by fulfilling the demands upon him/her. This raises another important insight for our political theology. Political involvement cannot be simply reduced to certain programmes. It cannot be simply programmatic. Since it is

18: Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971, p. 89.

fundamentally relational, it aims to safeguard and maximise the freedom and dignity of each and all, and thus the wholeness of "persons-in-relation." At no point in time either persons or just relations can be subordinated to success of even the most well-meaning programmes.

(iv) *The sacramental character of the Church must be central for our political theology.* Then some implications follow :

Since the Christian community is the sacrament of the kingdom of God, it is penultimate in character. Therefore it must maintain the tension between the absolute demands of Christian love and the morality of the realm of the relative, that is, the morality of what is politically feasible. At the same time since we are the signs of the kingdom, our identity as the people of God is not co-terminous with our political strategies. If we do confuse between our identity as the people of God and our political actions, we shall end up in absolutizing our strategies and actions. This danger of political messianism must be avoided. The sacramental character of Christian involvement in politics will remind us of the ambiguous character of our involvement itself. There will often be a hiatus between the demands of our faith and political necessity. This must be affirmed.

(v) Since the Christian vision of reality does not provide the total picture of man or the ordering of society or of the course of history, we ought to be critical of ourselves and our theologies of politics. This will also lead us to learn from and co-operate with people of other faiths and ideologies in a critical and creative manner.

(vi) Our faith and theology can never claim superiority over political struggles. At the same time what is important is serving people and not our theology or a political institution. As Karl Barth puts it, "Man has not to serve causes; causes have to serve man."<sup>19</sup>

(vii) As the Church is universal and Catholic, Christian involvement in politics cannot let us become nationalistic and parochial in the narrow sense. For every problem of a particular region or group is bound up with the human problem at the worldwide social, economic and political spheres.

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19. See Karl Barth, *Community, State and Church*, (New York : Doubleday, 1960), pp. 167 ff. and also "The political responsibility of The Christian community," theses prepared by the political commission of the SCM of the German Federal Republic : *Student World*, 61 (1968), pp. 180-182.

(viii) The Role of Christian hope in our participation in the midst of political agonies must be discovered. Since the coming of the just polity of God is of God's own doing, it should keep us continuously open and ready without falling into a sterile utopianism.

For our fundamental affirmation is that the signs of the just rule of God that we have glimpses of, will blossom in all their fullness. The process that God has set in motion in Christ will sweep through until "justice rolls on like a river and righteousness like an ever flowing stream." Then the blessings of the just rule of God will be shared by all humans. This is the impetus form our present action. But the present in itself cannot be meaningful. The present manifestation of God's just political order in the lives of the faithful will one day find its fulfilment when all the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our God and His Christ. It is to this fact we are the *advance agents*. One who has such faith can meaningfully involve himself in the present without falling into a debilitating pessimism nor a contentless utopianism.

A theology that arises out of our existence as *advance agents* of God's coming political order will be an authentic political theology and that alone will have the power to mobilize the people of God for involvement in concrete political action today and tomorrow.