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# Serving the Nation as Serving the Church

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“By Blood, I’m Albanian. By Citizenship, I’m Indian. By Faith, I’m a Catholic Nun. As to My Calling, I Belong to the World. As to My Heart, I Belong Entirely to the Heart of Jesus.” - St. Mother Teresa

## Introduction

‘Serving man is to serve God; Serving the Church is to serve the nation’. The preamble of the Indian constitution under Articles 25-28 denotes the objectives which secures to every citizen. They are justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. Through these a human person is socially, economically and politically eligible to serve one another (Compendium of Social Doctrine 160). The social teaching of the Catholic Church, on the other hand, elucidates four similar principles: the dignity of the human person, common good, subsidiarity and finally, solidarity. Every human being is unique because he or she was formed willed by God as an unrepeatable person, created out of love, and redeemed with ever greater love. This shows us, what dignity the human person has

and how important it is to take everyone quite seriously as a person and to treat him or her with the greatest respect. The social order exists for the sake of human beings and must be guided by what a human being needs for a dignified life. The objectives of the principles of the Nation and principles of the Church are to serve the people to live dignified life. In this article I would like to reflect on some of the challenges and opportunities, while serving the nation and serving the Church.

### **To Serve the Nation is to Serve the Church**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 1 states that, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood”. It offers an opportunity and challenge to draw everyone into service/ministry on behalf of the Church and the Nation.

Every day we see different modes of violence: genocide, war and exile, hunger and exploitation. Children are recruited as soldiers and forced to kill. New forms of slavery like child labour are being promoted. Human trafficking, prostitution, and drugs, emergence of anti-life forces, discrimination against women, crores of rupees of business in which political parties and even government officials are involved. In such cases we must not insist on human rights only when it is a question of protecting our own: we must realize that we also have the task of defending and strengthening the fundamental rights of the people. This is the way the Church has made it her duty in all places and on every occasion to see to it that human rights are universally accepted and upheld and, above all, to respect them within the Church herself. Christian social doctrine is naturally tied to universal values that

logically precede it. The social principles are guidelines for shaping society. All values, in turn, are connected with the dignity of the human person. As a primary value this results from man's likeness to God. The Bishops of India, on lay participation made a statement, "The fact that each of us is a part of Christ's body (1 Cor 12,12-17) and it is necessary to bring about authentic communion (*Christifideles Laici* 20) to provide the foundation for such consistent service, our people need an initiation to daily contemplative prayer which alone can give us the required strength to empty ourselves and become servants as Jesus did" (Phil 2,1-11) (CBCI 1996, Trivandrum, no 3).

### **Prophetic Call for Transformation**

The Church of India is exploited politically in various aspects while the church initiates herself in every field. All Christians do not agree that social involvement of the church which includes the possibility of social transformation, which is part of the Christian vocation. It has become a common understanding among Christians of many different traditions that the body of Christ and its members have something to contribute to matters of political and social concern. In this regard Archbishop Anil Couto of Delhi Archdiocese called all Parish Priests and Religious institutions in his diocese on 8<sup>th</sup> May, 2018 to pray for the peace of our nation and the forth-coming General Elections in 2019. It became breaking news in television news channels, with reporters hovering around the cathedral and news anchors were screaming about "turbulent time", "a new government" and "fast and prayers" these words in the letter were an explosive combination in the eyes of the TV anchors. Since many of the political leaders opposing this letter, the ruling Bharatiya Janata

Party whose senior spokespersons saying this was proof of a Papal “regime change” conspiracy to eject Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi. It is a fact that such prayer letters and press statements are issued by many Bishops before local or general elections calling on people to fulfill their duty as citizen by coming out to vote, and to vote for good and honest people. In the past, the Goa Bishop’s appeal to elect honest people in fact produced a BJP government as local Catholics rejected Congressmen who were seen as corrupt. In many places in the 2014 general election, Catholic Bishops, clergy and congregations had resonated with Modi’s stirring call of good Governance and the sorely needed promise of jobs. Unemployment and underemployment are a major issue in the Christian community. An invitation for collective prayer indeed offers an opportunity for social awakening. In the short run, the TV storm kept the focus away from Tuticorin where the local people, many of them Catholics, have been protesting the expansion of the Sterlite plant owned by the UK-based corporate giant Vedanta. Many of the dead in police firing, in fact, are Catholic young men. Archbishop Oscar Romero was brutally gunned down by the brutal regime of his country *El Salvador* on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1980. The day before he was killed in his Sunday homily he called out to his government saying, “In the name of God, and in the name of his suffering people; those who have suffered so much and whose cry reach out to heaven with greater intensity each day, I implore you, I beg you, I order you in the name of God: stop the repression immediately”. So far as the Bible urges to ‘seek the welfare of the city’ (Jer 29,7), the Christians cannot but pray for the progress of the country. The present time is a great challenge for minority Christians who face the serious attacks on churches and peoples. There

were number of attacks in the Sacred Heart Cathedral, Delhi since 2015. The churches were attacked and the Holy Species were thrown down. The priest, nuns and lay faithful who gathered for peaceful protest, were pulled with brutal force and were taken to the police station.

Though the Church does not encourage party politics as well as partisan ideologies, she does not deter her children from participating in civil affairs with an intention to contribute to it. Discerning divine will from the Sacred Scriptures it has been the tradition of the Church to guide its faithful to meaningfully engage in the public life. Being a Christian does not mean to shrink into a spiritual cocoon praying for oneself, but envisages to actively participate in the social life by being the “Salt of the earth and light of the world” (Mt 5,13-14).

### **Theology of Mission**

The missionary church exists for the transformation of the community that it serves, through the power of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit. The kingdom of God is its goal and the church is a servant and sign of God’s kingdom in its community. She is active in calling people to faith in Jesus Christ, and equally committed to the development of a consistent Christian lifestyle appropriate to the cultures in which she operates. She engages with culture, but also presents a counter-cultural challenge as well as communities. The mission of God as creator, through Christ, in the spirit, is to bring into being, sustain and perfect the whole creation. The church is both the fruit and the agent of God’s mission. It is therefore of the essence of the Church to be a missionary community. To be very practical, the incident which happened in the life of Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, our former Honorable President

of India, could be a great example. In 1960, Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, who was pioneer of space program in Kerala, was searching for a land to study for the electro jet properties of outer space. They searched the whole country. Finally, they landed in Kerala and located Thumba, Trivandrum as the right place to start the space programme. He found 200 acres of land where the life of thousands of families survived on fishing, then St. Mary's Church, Bishop's house and school in that land. Dr. Vikram Sarabhai approached all the politicians but they refused and we are helpless. At last, he approached Bishop Peter Bernard Pereira. On a Sunday when all the parishioners gathered for Holy Mass, Bishop introduced and addressed them regarding the problem of the great Scientist. He said, I pray to God, "God, forgive the sins of my people and give them peace". Likewise, the scientists pray by reasoning and give the benefits of the humanity. Both scientist and spiritualist seek happiness. Now, he wants God's abode, the church, the school and your abode. He promised us that he will give you everything new in a few months of time. Can you give my children? The people after pin drop silence for a moment, got up and said, "Amen". At that moment the Church has won, the nation also won. This is the true service that both Church and nation could do for the betterment of everyone's lives.

### **Mission Among the Poor and Marginalized**

The church as the body of Christ is called to be in the midst, that is, a living presence of God among all of God's people. From the perspective of the marginalized however this is above all a call to a life-giving and life-transforming presence among and alongside people in struggle and in pain. The Indian situation is characterized mainly by poverty,

inequality, injustice and oppression which caused an Adivasi tribal man beaten to death in Attappady. Many people lack the necessities of life; food, clothing, shelter, hygienic conditions and even minimum education. During the massive flood and heavy rainfall in Kerala, which took hundreds of people's lives and their shelter, people from all over the country helped without considering the caste and religion to save their precious life. It was God-given opportunity to help each other, to show God's mercy towards them and serve the nation. Improving the healthcare facilities and literacy in the rural periphery of India, thereby promoting rural development is central to Christian contribution to the nation. Catholic social action is aimed at the integral development of the individual and an inclusive development of the country that doesn't deprive the poor and the marginalized. What motivates Catholic-Christians to reach out to the scum of society to serve them with love. What distinguishes the Christian -humanitarian service from all other altruistic service being done by groups other than Christians is that the force behind the former is not a thing but a person: Jesus Christ. It is the opportunity to imitate Jesus Christ our eternal Healer and Compassionate Saviour.

### **The Catholic Institutions**

All over the country, there are thousands of medical establishments, educational institutions and charitable associations serving millions of people, particularly the poor, handicapped and the needy irrespective of gender, race, color, religion, culture, etc. Through such educational and social activities, Christian values are spread and the quality of our life of our tradition-bound society living in economic, social, cultural backwardness is improved. An ever-growing number

of Indians of all cultures and religions seek education in Church-run institutions. The educational institutions have been instrumental in spreading Christian influence and there are opportunities to the students to be honest, prayerful with faith in God, peace with disciplined, dedicated, integrated, service-minded, etc. The recent note on June 11, 2018 that the Catholic Bishop's Conference of India (CBCI) has instructed all catholic educational institutions in India to teach Indian constitutions in order to make the students aware of its beauty and richness.

### **Mission Among the Secular Nationalism**

Serving the nation has to be an inclusive process involving all sections of the people. But large sections of the people have been left out while they start their service in India: the Adivasis, the Dalits and people in several of the Indian states bordering other countries. The issue related to serving the nation is the competing ideas of nationalism. The secular nationalism of our constitution represents the cultural aspects of Hindutva, the present scenario excludes sections and communities. Though a human person has the right to practice his belief by practical expression in any manner, the conversion by force is unlawful. The proclamation of the Church in the nation doesn't mean the conversion of people to the Christianity, rather it takes an opportunity of participating in the saving acts of Jesus. We have to examine closely the nature of the state that is evolving with challenges now. Under the impact of globalization, the state has abdicated many of its welfare responsibilities. We need to reconsider the theology on Church and State in the light of the transformation of the whole nation. Jesus says, "whatever you have done to the



least of these, you have done it to me. I was hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, a stranger and in prison” (Mt 25, 40-43).

### **Media Literacy**

We live in a period where a significant number of people overtly think that our democracy is apparently supported by the fourth pillar-the media. Though there are benefits to be a part of the life of people and to become Jesus, there are lot of defects to the nation and Church by the advancement of media. In social media, many people do not consider verifying facts before forwarding a message. The advancement of media at present, using the features, that could make possible to trace even the source accounts very easily. The world of fact is that the users of social media, especially the youth are misled, influenced and forced to interpret about the Church leaders; Bishops, Priests and Religious, guided by Satan worshipers to acquire the souls into their community. It also indirectly violates them in an unsecure way by which the leaders are misidentified to do the same acts in their life. So that, personally, emotionally and behaviorally they are imbalanced while serving the nation and the Church. The so-called scandals paves way to lose the sense of sacredness of both Nation and the Church.

### **Political Efficacies**

In our age and time being concerned for the ‘least of these’ means being active in the political processes with commitment to justice expressed through solidarity with those who struggle for justice. The Church must always emphasise the necessary and useful nature of politics while pointing out its temporal and relative character. Politics is decisive in the lives of people and it is one realm in which a Christian

can virtually express faith. It is an important vocation for the individual Christian and for the churches. We should not however underestimate the deep ethical ambiguities and strong tensions which may emerge for individual Christians and within the Christian community as a result of involvement in politics. St. Mother Teresa's personal conviction that her work was propelled by Christ, who she loved with her life, and who she saw in every human being, and more so those in suffering, was sought to being reduced to a political argument of destabilizing Indian or specifically Hindu society. The mission of the Catholic Missionaries of Charity is to serve the poorest of the poor, destitute, and those dying undignified deaths, irrespective of their religious beliefs. They do so without compromise, and with no strings attached.

### **Religious Pluralism**

The Christian ratio in our country is 2.30 percentage while comparing to other religions. The contemporary anti-Christian attack in our nation has been on the increase. The example of religious violence in Kandhamal district at in Odisha where the whole Christian community was attacked for no reason. The sisters of the order, founded by Saint Mother Teresa, were providing primary medical care the people of the area, irrespective of caste or creed. A series of riots led by radical Hindus left roughly 100 people dead, thousands injured, 300 churches and 6000 homes destroyed and 50000 people displaced, many were forced to hide in nearby forests where many died of hunger and snakebites. While following the Gospel message by helping the people, the missionaries were especially targeted to be attacked from every corner of the nation. The challenge of Fr. Tom Uzhunnalil who was kidnapped and released recently is a committed missionary.

In these situations, the Christian experience of Jesus Christ as the fullness of life can challenge the dehumanizing elements of these cultures and religions.

### **Impacts of Globalization**

Pope Benedict XVI, in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* criticizes globalization, and says, “while the poor of the world continue to knock on the doors of the rich, the world affluence runs the risk of no longer hearing these knocks, on account of a conscience that can no longer distinguish what is human” (CV 75). A major issue raised by globalization is that of dehumanization. The powers that rule the country are identified with the corporate mafias who care least about the rights of the poor or environmental safeguards. Demonetization has been a major heist on the country, favouring the rich and the ruling political parties. Through this the middle class of the country have been affected. The poor become poorer every day. Fuel prices have increased to an all-time high, with every day hikes. A year ago, when everything was brought under GST, five crucial petroleum products remain unaffected due to corruption. Suicide by farmers continue at alarming numbers all over the country. In a recent study by the world health organization (WHO) India is one among the fourteen of the most polluted cities in the world. Healthcare is still beyond the reach of the poor Indian.

### **The Family as the Foundation of Society**

Human person is by nature designed for communion. This is clear in the Bible verses saying that, “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen 2,18). The church in this regard consider family is the most important natural community. The family has special rights and is central to all social life.

So, the family is the foundation of society, for all social arrangements proceed from it. Every member of the family is recognized, accepted and respected by the others in his dignity, without having to do anything to deserve it. After all, the fact that individuals also learn in the family the meaning of social responsibility and solidarity likewise benefits society as a whole: someone who proves to be responsible and to practice solidarity in little things will be more likely to do so in big things, too. The habits of better understanding of people who are desperate, lonely or abandoned, devotion to the poor, caring for the sick or the elderly are driven from the family, in which it makes an irreplaceable contribution to the “Humanization of Society”.

In the present scenario, the family is primarily, the place where the continuation of society is ensured. Secondly, the family performs the specific task of socializing and raising children. Cultural, ethical, social, intellectual and religious values and traditions are handed down, and they are fundamental for every free and conscientious person. The parents also have the right and duty to raise their children themselves and to provide them with a comprehensive education. It seeks to help make children law-abiding, peaceful citizens who are capable of dialogue, encounter, and solidarity by teaching them practice the virtues of justice and love. The elderly people, in the family also, can make a decisive contribution toward the well-being of the family and society as a whole. They can transmit values and traditions and support the young. When elderly people are sick and needy, they need not only medical attention and appropriate care but above all loving treatment and surroundings. In the case of children in the family, they have to be strengthened and defended in every way. As St. Mother Teresa said, “a

child is God's greatest gift to the family, to the nation, to the world." Children are the true future of humanity. They are in a challenging world and need help. In many parts of the world there is lack of medical care, appropriate nutrition, elementary education, and even no place to live. Moreover, there are ongoing scandals such as trafficking of children, child labor, the street children, the deployment of children in wars, child marriage and (sexual) abuse of children. There must be a decisive campaign on national and international level against violation of the dignity of boys and girls that occur through sexual exploitation and all forms of violence against the dignity and right of every child.

The 8-year-old girl Asifa who was brutally raped and killed recently in Kathua, is an example and there are many more similar happenings in our country. There are also ritual practices in our nation and minor girls are victims of crude carnal pleasures while the adult women are often forced to believe that they are partners and co-beneficiaries of some spiritual and material benefits. As the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill said, "It is easier to rule a nation than raise four children". There is so much atrocity taking place in the country all the time but tragically a good section of our media hardly highlights these grim realities.

## **Conclusion**

It is an honor for any Christian to serve the society through the service in the Church. In the course of Christian leadership, it is not something restricted to certain individuals or groups. Every disciple of Jesus and the whole community is called to do good to others. As a Christian, our greatest responsibility is to live the Gospel, which will help both others and ourselves. In the present context of India where

Christianity is being blackmailed and Christian holy places of worship are vandalized, we are called to imitate Christ's self-giving compassion even towards those who oppress us. As Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation, states, "We can resist leaving behind a familiar and easy way of doing things. Yet the challenges involved can be like the storm, the whale, the worm that dried the gourd plant or the wind and sun. For us, they can serve to bring us back to the God of tenderness, who invites us to set out ever anew on our journey" (*Gaudete et Exsultate* 134). Even the Nation needs transformation of political, religious, family, cultural and linguistic aspects. On the other side, the Church continues to face the challenges making use of the opportunities providing everything to those in need. Through patience, justice, prudence, dialogue, integrity, solidarity, dedication, etc., the Nation and Church could be modified with love and peace. These can last only if both we and others recognize that all are responsible for a common life which is determined by God. Finally, as Christians, we are expected to accept the stormy events of the Nation and live for the common good. It is possible only by imitating Christ, like St. Mother Teresa dedicated her whole life to the Church and the Nation.

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