

GABRIEL MARCEL'S CONCEPT OF PARTICIPATION AND THE CHURCH'S
INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS

A Thesis

Presented to the

Graduate Faculty of the

College of Arts and Sciences

University of San Carlos

Cebu City, Philippines

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS IN PHILOSOPHY

by

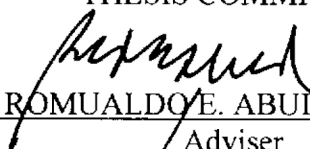
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March 21, 2011

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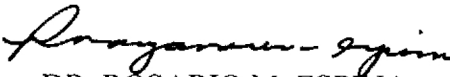

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DEDICATION

To my beloved wife,

Novelyn L. Geralde,

whose love, inspiration, encouragement and sacrifices have
made this manuscript possible

To my daughter,

Sophia L. Geralde

To my son,

Gabriel L. Geralde

Blas A. Geralde

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The researcher would like to extend his heartfelt gratitude to the following for their unwavering assistance and invaluable contributions for the completion of this study:

To Bro Romualdo E. Abulad, SVD, Ph. D, Chairman, Philosophy Department and Religious Studies, University of San Carlos, the researcher's adviser, who shared his expertise and professional advice that lead to the completion of this research and for meticulously editing this manuscript.

To Fr. Heinz Kulueke, SVD, Ph D, who inspired and widen the perspective of the researcher to come up with this study, to Dr Rosario Espina and Dr. Ryan Urbano, for comments and suggestions,

To Dean Ofelia G Maña, Campus Academic Director, University of Cebu-Banilad, to the Allied Faculty of Univesity of Cebu-Banilad, for their encouragement,

To his loving and supportive parents, Fusebio "Boy" Geralde and Alfreda Geralde, for unceasingly giving him moral support, to his brother Teresito Geralde and Family, to his Lolo and Lola, relatives and friends,

To his beloved and lovely wife Novelyn I Geralde, for the support, love, inspiration, and prayers.

To his daughter Sophia L. Geralde and son Gabriel I. Geralde,

To Blessed Mary, the mother of all and Most of all, to God Almighty, the giver of life, the source of wisdom, for His guidance and blessings that make this work possible and life meaningful

Blas A. Geralde

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|---|------|
| CHAPTER I | |
| INTRODUCTION | |
| Rationale | 1 |
| Theoretical Background | 4 |
| THE PROBLEM | |
| Statement of the Problem | 15 |
| Significance of the Study | 15 |
| Scope and Limitation | 17 |
| RESEARCH METHODOLOGY | 18 |
| DEFINITIONS OF TERMS | 18 |
| ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY | 20 |
| CHAPTER II | |
| GABRIEL MARCEL'S CONCEPT OF PARTICIPATION | |
| A. The Loss of Ontological Sense | 21 |
| B. Foundation: Abstraction and Possession | 24 |
| C. Towards the Concept of Participation | 27 |
| a. Being in a Situation | 27 |
| b. Problem and Mystery | 29 |
| c. Ontological Exigence | 33 |
| d. Being and Having | 34 |
| e. Being and Existence | 36 |
| f. My Being and My Life | 37 |

| | |
|--|----|
| D. Levels of Participation According to Marcel | 37 |
| a. Level of Incarnation | 38 |
| a. My Body as Mine | 39 |
| b. Sensation and Feeling | 41 |
| c. The Nature of Thought | 43 |
| b. Level of Communion | 45 |
| a. Love and Availability | 47 |
| b. Hope | 50 |
| c. Creative Fidelity towards Faith | 51 |
| d. Concept of Freedom | 54 |
| c. The Level of Transcendence | 56 |
| E. Marcel's Concept of Participation | 58 |
| CHAPTER III | |
| CHURCH INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS | |
| The Human Person in the Modern World | 63 |
| Church and Politics | 65 |
| Basic Premises of the Church Involvement in Politics | 69 |
| a. The Kingdom of God call the Church to Political Involvement | 69 |
| b. The Moral Dimension of Politics | 70 |
| c. The Mission of the Church for Integral Salvation involves the Temporal Sphere | 72 |
| d. The Dignity of the Human Person is affected by Politics | 75 |
| Guiding Politics by Moral and Religious Truth | 80 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| a. The Concept of Human Dignity and Solidarity as First Principle in Politics | 80 |
| b. The Principle of the Common Good- the Goal of Political Activity | 82 |
| c. Authority and Power as Divine Trust of Service | 86 |
| d. The Principle of Subsidiary | 87 |
| Role of the Church and Laity in Politics | 88 |
| Pastoral Action of the Church to Fulfill its Mission of Evangelizing and Transforming Politics | 94 |
| a. Catechesis or Christian Education in Politics | 95 |
| b. The Conversion of the People to New Values | 97 |
| c. Structural Change as the Goal of Pastoral Action | 98 |
| d. A Call to Active Participation in Politics by Civil Society | 99 |
| The Concept of Participation according to Church Teaching | 101 |
| CHAPTER IV CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS | 105 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 112 |
| CURRICULUM VITAE | 120 |

INTRODUCTION

Rationale

The call for an individual to be an active participant in social transformation leads to the Church's involvement in politics. In the more than 2000 years that the faithful have submitted themselves to duly constituted authority, they are supposed to have cooperated with the Church according to their conscience and the pursuit of the common good.¹ Lay involvement in politics arises from the growing concern of the church for political impartiality, signifying that the Church is not an edifice but an institution of people with a mission to fulfill. A Christian writer states that

(Christians) reside in their own nations, but as resident aliens. They participate in all things as citizens and endure all things as foreigners. They obey the established laws and their way of life surpasses the laws. . . So noble is the position to which God has assigned them that they are not allowed to desert it.²

It is in this respect that the human person as a member of the Church body cannot just be a spectator but must be a participant. There is no exception to this, for a democracy cannot be productive and fruitful without the active and responsible involvement of everyone.

The tendency to be individualistic in the name of democracy is a mentality that prevails among our political leaders, creating a pluralistic mentality in the civil society. Our political leaders are caught up in a system that controls the acts and

¹ Leonardo Medroso, "Church and Politics" available from <http://medroso.blogspot.com>, Internet, accessed 6 August 2008

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2240, (Philippines: Word and Life Publications 1994)

behavior of men while securing the teaching of the Church and protecting its vested interests. This creates an ethical pluralism by which citizens claim complete autonomy with regards to their moral choices. They enact laws that are oftentimes unethical and immoral in the pretext of respecting the people's freedom of choice³ This is an alarming situation that should concern the people of the faith. These ambiguous and questionable positions of lawmakers should be taken up by those who belong to the Church. Politics has become an arena of personal interests among both the powerful and the weak, the rich and the poor. So to speak, politics interferes in the integral development of the people. This hurts the people and is considered as the biggest obstacle to their full human development. Politics becomes a serious threat to the human race, a problem instead of a safeguard for the people.

But politics can change only if the people will renew themselves. It means that the people must change first and not the political system. Therefore, Christians are being called to participate and be involved in the political affairs of the State. The social teachings of the Church must determine the limits of people's participation and involvement in political affairs and they should not run for any positions that may only lead to partisan politics. This is the reason why the Church in the Philippines is active, vocal and visible. The Church must be firm in promoting the common good by safeguarding the moral integrity and values of the individual. It cannot allow itself to succumb to a political idealism from which only a few are benefiting. In reality, the more the Church becomes involved in and aware of the current problems in politics,

³ Leonardo Medroso, "Church and Politics," available from <http://medros.blogspot.com/2005/02/church-and-politics.html>, Internet accessed 6 August 2008

the more can it be accused of violating the so-called separation of the Church and State

However, moral reflection would ask: Is the participation of the Church in the political life of the State sufficient to fulfill its mission? Is the Church effective in its evangelical participation? Has the common good been achieved? These are only a few questions that haunt the Church in its involvement in politics.

The great challenge is how to participate as members of the institutional body, the Church. Since Church and Politics are composed of the lay people, there is a need to understand the human person in relation to the self, to others and to the Absolute Thou. It is an urgent call for all human beings, rich or poor, powerful or weak, to restore the dignity of the people through active and creative participation in politics. The human person cannot separate and isolate himself or herself from this reality, nor can the Church separate itself from the reality that confronts it. The human person is a participative being, so his Church must also participate in the affairs of the State. It is only through this participation that there can be a true Church that safeguards the values and moral integrity of the people in line with the teachings of the gospel.

A thorough understanding of Gabriel Marcel's concept of participation will enable one to redirect the path one has followed in order to help fulfill the mission of the Church. This research aims to enlighten the individual believers on how to participate amidst the growing pluralistic mentality and abstraction in politics. Since the attainment of the common good can only be pursued through continued participation, the Church can not exist without participating in the world of politics.