



Faith and Citizenship: A Theological Reflection on the Political Participation of Catholics

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Abstract. Faith is often understood as a personal and spiritual relationship with God; however, in Catholic theology, faith also possesses an inherent social and political dimension. This study examines the relationship between Christian faith and citizenship through a theological reflection on the political participation of Catholics in Indonesia. The research aims to demonstrate that faith and political engagement are not separate spheres but mutually enriching dimensions of the Christian vocation to promote justice, solidarity, and the common good. Employing a qualitative method with a literature review approach, this study analyzes biblical foundations, the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, and the Church's social doctrine, alongside contemporary discussions on political participation. The findings indicate that political participation can be understood as a concrete expression of faith and moral responsibility, particularly through civic engagement, political education, advocacy, and social involvement. Nevertheless, many Catholics remain passive due to negative perceptions of politics, corruption, and a lack of political formation. The study also highlights the importance of maintaining the Church's moral autonomy while encouraging lay participation in practical politics. In the Indonesian context, the principle "100% Catholic, 100% Indonesian" reflects an integrated identity in which religious commitment strengthens civic responsibility. Ultimately, this research affirms that authentic faith necessarily leads to active citizenship, where Catholics contribute prophetically and ethically to the transformation of society and the realization of the common good.

Keywords: Catholic Social Teaching; Citizenship; Faith; Political Participation; Theology.

1. INTRODUCTION

Faith is often understood as belief in God, who is believed to be Almighty. In spiritual life, faith is believed to be a gift from God. (Gea, 2020). Faith is always attached to individuals who are referred to as believers or religious people. These believers exist within society in a country, so they also have status as citizens. In the context of Catholicism, believers are also referred to as members of the Church and citizens of the state. In essence, believers live out both citizenships without leaning toward one and neglecting the other.

The Church as a community of believers has a solid foundation, namely love, because God Himself is Love. On this foundation, the Church is sent to proclaim the good news and love itself. In this proclamation, the Church is inclusive by striving for the common good. One way to do this is to be actively involved in social and political life. The Church is called not only for itself but for everyone, because Jesus himself came into the world to save humanity or the world (Sihombing, 2022).

In the context of the Church and the State, political participation is important to reflect upon. Political participation is understood as the tangible manifestation of the principle of popular sovereignty, which is the main foundation for the continuity of the democratic system.

Its presence plays a strategic role in activating and maintaining the dynamics of democratic mechanisms (Hemafitria dkk., 2021). Active and meaningful community involvement will encourage the creation of political development and more effective democratic practices in Indonesia. These conditions will ultimately contribute significantly to the progress of the nation and state. Conceptually, political participation can be understood as citizen involvement in various political activities, such as village head elections (Averus & Alfina, 2020). Furthermore, political participation also refers to the ability and willingness of the people to be involved in the political decision-making process, either directly or through a representative system (Padilah dkk., 2023). In the context of a democratic country, the level of political participation is an important indicator of the exercise of people's sovereignty, as it reflects the legitimacy of the highest power being in the hands of the people, which is manifested through their involvement in democratic processes, such as general elections (Awaliah dkk., 2023).

The view that politics is always understood as an effort to create the common good is in line with the teachings of the Church. From this, it can be understood that the Church should have the spirit to engage in politics as a form of faith. However, in the Indonesian context, it seems that many believers are reluctant to get involved in politics. They live within the Church but are not active in the political world. In fact, the state and the Church share the same vision of creating human civilization and the common good (Susanta, 2019). Many people think that politics is bad. Politics is even considered a crime, with numerous cases of corruption and government policies that do not favor the poor.

In 2025, Abraham's research shows that there is indeed participation from the Catholic Church, especially young people, in the political world, but it is still very dependent on external factors or other people. They still need motivation and encouragement from others (Abraham, 2025a). This shows that there is still a lack of initiative or awareness to engage in politics. Another study conducted by Dhedhu shows that Catholic politicians are still expected to be involved in politics (Dhedhu, 2021). This study highlights the existence of the Church in the political world, but it is not yet optimal. In 2024, Odi wrote that the Catholic Church played a role in the preparations for the 2024 elections. One of these preparations was political education. This research is interesting, but the results of these preparations are unknown. In the same study, Odi said that the Catholic Church in Indonesia was considered to have experienced a decline in its ability to respond quickly to various political developments and tended to take a passive stance in addressing the complexities of political life due to the various situations it faced (Odi, 2023).

Existing studies show different focuses. None of these studies focus on reflections on faith and citizenship. This study will present a different analysis and focus from previous studies. This study will show how faith and citizenship are reflected from a theological perspective in relation to the participation of the Catholic Church. This study aims to emphasize that faith and politics cannot be separated. The Church always encourages its followers to hold fast to truth and justice. Especially when the world is not doing well, the Church needs to be present to uphold the truth. This study also shows how the Church should respond to an unjust world. In its various teachings, the Church encourages all its followers to take a stand for truth and love. In the Indonesian context, the Catholic Church has a very good characteristic, namely 100% Catholic 100% Indonesian, as quoted by Eka Cipta (Cipta, 2020). This motto was first expressed by Mgr. Albertus Soegijapranata, SJ, Indonesia's first native bishop.

The Church's lack of participation in politics makes research urgent. Church life should be directly proportional to involvement in social and political life. Active involvement by the Church will bear fruit in the form of faith not only in the Church, but also in all citizens without exception. The Apostle Paul demonstrated an attitude worthy of emulation, namely proclaiming the good news not only to Jews but also to non-Jews (Abraham, 2025b). Based on the background description above, this study aims to answer the following questions. (1) How is the relationship between Christian faith and citizenship understood from the perspective of Catholic theology and the social teachings of the Church? (2) How can political participation be understood as a concrete manifestation of the faith and moral responsibility of Catholics as members of the Church and citizens of the state? (3) How does the Catholic faith combine political involvement with the moral autonomy of the Church so that faith becomes the ethical basis for citizenship?

2. METHOD

This study applies a qualitative method with a literature review approach. According to John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, qualitative research is an activity that places researchers directly in the context of social life to understand reality as it is. This approach seeks to represent the world through various forms of data, such as field notes, interviews, conversations, visual documentation, recordings, and reflective memos. Thus, qualitative researchers examine phenomena in their natural setting to gain a deep understanding and interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Literature studies are an important part of qualitative research, as they utilize various previous studies and relevant literature as a theoretical basis

and analytical reference for the research being conducted (Agustini dkk., 2024). In this study, the author uses various types of sources, particularly previous scientific journals that examine topics related to this study.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Relationship Between Christian Faith and Citizenship in the Catholic Theological Perspective

Since Vatican Council II, the Catholic Church has lived with a spirit of *aggiornamento*. In this spirit, the Church has undergone a transformation from exclusivity to inclusivity. From this, the Church shows that the Christian faith is never private or individualistic, but has an inherent social dimension. Faith is not only a personal relationship with God, but also a call to build loving relationships with others in society. The Second Vatican Council, through *Gaudium et Spes*, affirmed that the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the people of this age are also the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the disciples of Christ. This statement shows that the Church does not stand apart from the reality of the world, but is present and involved in it. This means that citizenship is not merely an administrative status, but a concrete field for the realization of faith. Nevertheless, the clergy or those ordained in the Catholic Church cannot be involved in practical politics for several reasons, one of which is that they are *Alter Christus* (Jehaut & Denar, 2023).

The Church's social teachings further reinforce this relationship through the principles of human dignity, solidarity, subsidiarity, and the common good (*bonum commune*). These principles guide Catholics to be active in public life in order to build a just social structure. Being a member of the Church and a citizen are not two conflicting identities, but two complementary dimensions of vocation. Faith provides the moral foundation, while citizenship provides a space for loving action (Abraham, 2025c). Pope Paul VI, in his encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, article 81, encourages the laity not to be passive, but to take the initiative in shaping the temporal order with a Christian spirit, including in the laws and structures of society (Paul VI, 1967). In line with this, Pope John Paul II said that being a member of the Church and a citizen is not a contradiction, but rather a dual calling that complements each other, where faith provides a moral foundation and citizenship becomes a space for practicing love. The Church's social teachings place humanity at the center, with social doctrine as a tool for evangelization that reveals its dignity in modern society (John Paul II, 1991).

This study shows that theologically there is no dichotomy between religious piety and socio-political responsibility. In fact, separating the two contradicts the essence of Christ's incarnation, who is present in human history. Catholic Church teaching affirms a clear distinction between the realm of faith (the Church) and politics (the State), but the two are interrelated. Faith should not be confused with partisan politics, but Catholics are called to engage in politics responsibly, guided by the principles of the Gospel, justice, and love. This aims to form a just society and serve the common good, with faith that purifies political reasoning (Benediktus XVI, 2005). Catholics who are faithful to their faith become better citizens, obedient to legitimate civil authority in all forms of legitimate government. Moral education without religion is not enough; only the Catholic faith forms the conscience for virtue and honest citizenship (Pius XI, 1929).

Political Participation as a Concrete Manifestation of Faith

A conceptual analysis of political participation shows that citizen involvement in democratic processes such as elections, political education, policy advocacy, and social control are forms of moral responsibility for the common good. In the light of Catholic theology, these actions can be understood as concrete expressions of love. Church teachings emphasize participation as an inherent obligation of human dignity, which is realized through a love-inspired political commitment to build a just and humane society. Love (*caritas*) in the Church tradition does not stop at personal charitable acts but also demands the transformation of social structures. Pope Benedict XVI in *Caritas in Veritate* emphasizes that love must be manifested in the political and economic spheres for social justice to be built. Thus, political participation is not merely a secular activity, but part of the practice of faith (Benedict XVI, 2009).

A review of previous studies shows that Catholic participation in Indonesia tends to be passive and dependent on external encouragement. This phenomenon indicates a gap between the Church's normative teachings and the concrete practices of the faithful. Politics is often perceived negatively because it is synonymous with corruption, manipulation, and power struggles. As a result, many believers choose to withdraw from the public sphere. However, theological readings show that apathy has the potential to weaken the prophetic role of the Church. When good people stay away from politics, the space is filled by narrow interests that harm society. Therefore, political participation can be interpreted as a form of witness to faith, namely by bringing the values of honesty, justice, and solidarity into a fragile system. In other words, political involvement becomes a concrete means of realizing Christ's commandment of love in the social order. Apparently, it is also important for the Church to learn not only from

Catholic figures but also from other religions. A Protestant theologian named Dietrich Bonhoeffer has shown his example through his extraordinary way of life. He lived during the NAZI era and firmly stated that faith must be expressed in political attitudes (Bonhoeffer, 1995).

Church Autonomy and Political Involvement: Limits and Responsibilities

The next finding shows the importance of distinguishing between moral involvement and practical partisanship. The Church as an institution is not affiliated with any party or political force but has an ethical responsibility to guide the conscience of the faithful. *Deus Caritas Est* affirms that the Church's direct task is not to take over the role of politics, but to form consciences so that the faithful are able to act responsibly in society. The Church maintains its autonomy from practical politics, does not propose systems or models of social organization, and does not claim power over the state. Pope Benedict XVI explains in *Deus Caritas Est*, article 28:

“The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice” (Benedict XVI, 2005)

This means that the Church is not a partisan political actor, but rather a guide that contributes through rational argument and spiritual formation, without replacing the political responsibility of the laity. The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church adds that the Magisterium of the Church “does not wish to exercise political power or eliminate the freedom of opinion of Catholics regarding contingent questions,” but rather enlightens the conscience of the faithful to promote the whole person and the common good.

Within this framework, the Church maintains its moral autonomy by continuing to speak out prophetically against injustice, corruption, and policies that harm the poor. The Church acts as an “ethical compass,” not a power player. Laity, as citizens, are called to be the main actors in practical politics. This model demonstrates a balanced division of roles. The Church provides moral principles and faith formation, while the laity embody them in concrete political action. This approach prevents the politicization of religion while avoiding passive neutrality.

Contextual Relevance for the Catholic Church in Indonesia

In the Indonesian context, the motto “100% Catholic, 100% Indonesian” synthesizes religious and national identity. Reflection shows that this motto has both theological and sociological significance. Faith does not alienate believers from their national responsibilities but rather deepens their commitment to building the nation. When the political world is in

turmoil, the Church must be present to speak the truth. Indeed, the Church faces many challenges, such as exclusion and even abuse, but these challenges also purify the Church's motivation to proclaim the truth.

The state of democracy in Indonesia, which is still marred by corruption, identity politics, and social inequality, demands a more active presence from the Church. The political participation of the faithful can be realized through political education, public policy advocacy, assistance to marginalized communities, and direct involvement in legislative and executive institutions. Thus, the Church is not only a moral observer, but also a critical partner of the state in fighting for social justice. Faith finds its relevance when it contributes to the real transformation of people's lives.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Christian faith and citizenship are not two separate or opposing realities, but rather two complementary dimensions of the Catholic vocation. From the perspective of Catholic theology and the Church's social teachings, faith inherently possesses a social and public character that calls believers to participate actively in the life of society and the state. Therefore, political participation should not be understood merely as a secular civic duty, but as a concrete expression of faith, love, and moral responsibility oriented towards the common good. Political engagement, when inspired by Gospel values, becomes a form of Christian witness that promotes justice, solidarity, and human dignity. The findings indicate, however, that the political involvement of Catholics in Indonesia often remains limited and passive due to negative perceptions of politics and dependence on external encouragement. Such apathy risks weakening the Church's prophetic role in addressing injustice and social problems. Consequently, Catholics are called to overcome this reluctance and to view politics as an arena for realizing *caritas* in social structures. At the same time, the Church must maintain its moral autonomy by refraining from partisan politics while continuing to guide consciences and provide ethical principles. This balanced relationship allows the Church to function as a prophetic and moral compass, while the laity acts as primary agents in practical political affairs. In the Indonesian context, the identity of being "100% Catholic and 100% Indonesian" affirms that fidelity to faith strengthens, rather than diminishes, commitment to the nation. Ultimately, authentic faith is manifested not only in personal piety but also in responsible civic engagement that contributes to the transformation of society toward justice and the common good.

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