



First International Meeting of Chaplains Serving Parliaments “Pastoral Care of Politicians, Spiritual Accompaniment and Promotion of the Common Good”

San Calisto, 14-15 November 2013

Introduction

It is a joy for me to welcome you to the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace for this first meeting of chaplains serving parliaments. Thank you for making yourselves available for these two days of discussion and labour. Let me especially thank the speakers who have agreed to enrich our reflections.

We are gathered here to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Vatican II. As we begin our deliberations, we cannot avoid thinking of the emphasis in *Gaudium et Spes* on participation in the political sphere: “There is no better way to establish political life on a truly human basis than by fostering an inward sense of justice and kindness, and of service to the common good, and by strengthening basic convictions as to the true nature of the political community and the aim, right exercise, and sphere of action of public authority.”¹ The mission of priests involved in various ways with political figures fits into this desire of Vatican II. This mission is not only one of defending particular positions, even if it is sometimes necessary to do so. Above all, it is imperative to assist those in public life to give their political engagement proper foundations and direction in an interiorized manner, through reflection and prayer, rather than leaving it merely to formal conventions.

A little more than ten years ago, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued its *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*.² It noted that “today’s democratic societies ... call for new and fuller forms of participation in public life by Christian and non-Christian citizens alike.”³ It analyzed the “cultural process” in which we are engaged, which combines the “great strides made in ... humanity’s progress in attaining conditions of life which are more in keeping with human dignity” with “the real dangers which certain tendencies in society are promoting through legislation, nor can one ignore the effects this will have on future generations.” The text went on to deplore “a kind of cultural relativism [that] exists today, evident in the conceptualization and defence of an ethical pluralism, which sanctions the decadence and disintegration of reason and the principles of the natural moral law.”⁴ The *Doctrinal Note* then proposed a thorough study of the conditions for a just secularism. Overall it urged a closer accompaniment of Christians involved in politics, to form them to engage in ever more serious

¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, 73.5.

² title, date, link

³ *Doctrinal Note*, § 1.

⁴ *Doctrinal Note*, § “.

subjects with true ethical discernment – that is, both fully rational and open to the light of Revelation.

This is the context in which you exercise your ministries to parliaments, and in which we gather here today. New and very serious issues call for a more vigorous commitment of the Church to politicians. This commitment must be both intellectual and spiritual. At the same time as helping Christian politicians to rationally discern the common good, we must nourish their hope and bolster their courage. But it is not for the clergy to replace the laity. Rather it is a matter of helping these politicians to exercise their baptismal responsibility fully and justly, in the spirit of *Lumen Gentium* and *Christifideles Laici*. Nor is it a matter of interfering with legitimate pluralism, but of helping those whose mission is to serve human dignity in all its dimensions. The preferential option for the poor includes the unborn and social insecurity, migrants and the elderly, the unemployed and the environment. One characteristic of Christians involved in politics is or should be an ability to promote an all-encompassing and coherent principle of humanity. Fr. Francesco Occhetta of *La Civiltà Cattolica* will open the reflection on dimensions of the Catholic political commitment, while Fr. Paolo Benanti will consider important new opportunities and challenges which come with the Digital Age we are in.

As a group, you practice your ministry in extremely varied conditions. Some of you have official status – you carry out functions that are recognized by your country’s governments. Others, particularly in more strictly secular States, are limited to offering ecclesial support more or less informally, outside of the parliamentary institution. For some, the ministry is primarily spiritual and oriented to worship, while others give most attention to ethical discernment. Some of you are engaged full-time with parliamentarians, while for others it is just one pastoral preoccupation among many, especially in countries where no genuine parliamentary ministry exists – or at least, not yet. We could regard the variety of your situations as an accurate reflection of the complexity of a right relationship of Christian faith to political life. Thus it will be productive for us to learn from each other’s experience.

In order for this sharing of experience to be as fruitful as possible, we thought that it should be enriched with a fundamental theological reflection on “the principles and relevance of Catholic theology of politics” and a broad sociological perspective on “Church-State relations in the world”. This is what Fr. Frédéric Louzeau and Professor José Casanova will provide this afternoon. The Doctrinal Note that I mentioned earlier asked important questions a decade ago; it is worthwhile to assess its impact and, with the benefit of hindsight, to explore the outlook for the years to come. For this we will hear from His Excellency Archbishop Luis Francisco Ladaria, Secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Ministry to parliamentarians, I have said, is a context of particular interest for collaboration between clergy and laity. That is why it was important to also have lay persons share their experiences and expectations with us. Spanish parliamentarian José Miguel Castillo Calvín and Tugdual Derville, Executive Director of Alliance Vita, will be our speakers. The latter will talk about “new models of Christian action”: it is very important nowadays to avoid restricting political action to the parliamentary or institutional setting, but to be active as well with lobbies and think tanks and with the worlds of public communication and social reflection.

This first meeting is mainly European and Western in focus. Accordingly, it is important to consider the specific conditions for political ministry in Europe. Monsignor Piotr Mazurkiewicz, Professor of Political Science in Warsaw and former Secretary General of COMECE, is a particularly appropriate speaker on this topic. Several chaplains will share their experiences: Bishop Lorenzo Leuzzi from Italy, Mons. Karl Jüsten from Germany and Fr. Patrick Conroy from the United States.

However, the catholicity of the Church is a persistent reminder to situate political action in the complex and fascinating perspective of globalization. Therefore I am especially pleased that a pioneer in this ministry from South Africa, Fr. Peter John Pearson, can also give us his testimony. Finally, Bishop Mario Toso, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, will review the various dimensions of the pastoral care and spiritual accompaniment of politicians and the promotion of the common good.

Dear friends, we shall devote two days to reflection and to sharing our experiences. But we will also experience a time of fraternity—that fraternity which is at the heart of the Christian experience and which is ours to share with a world longing for unity and peace. We will celebrate the Eucharist, the sacrament of unity and peace, and pray for those in positions of public authority today.

During the Great Jubilee Year of 2000, Blessed John Paul II, soon to be declared a Saint, named St. Thomas More as patron of politicians. Let us entrust our labours to his prayerful guidance. Through the intercession of St. Thomas More, I ask God to raise authentic servants of the common good throughout the world and priests who know how to accompany them. May the Lord bless our discussions and our work.

Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson
President