



The Holy See

JUBILEE OF GOVERNMENT LEADERS, MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT AND POLITICIANS

*ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II**

Saturday, 4 November 2000

1. I am most happy to welcome you, distinguished Government Leaders, Members of Parliament and men and women responsible for public life who have come to Rome for the Jubilee. I greet you and I thank Senator Nicola Mancino for the kind words he has spoken on your behalf. My grateful thoughts turn to Senator Francesco Cossiga, who has actively promoted the proclamation of Saint Thomas More as Patron of Statesmen and Politicians. My greeting also goes to the other distinguished leaders, including Mr Mikhail Gorbachev, who have spoken in this assembly. I offer a special word of welcome to the Heads of State present.

Our meeting gives me the opportunity to reflect together with you, in the light of the motions just presented, on the nature of the mission which God, in his Providence, has entrusted to you, and on the responsibilities inherent in that mission. Yours can well be deemed a true and genuine *vocation to politics*, which in practice means the governance of nations, the formulation of laws and the administration of public affairs at every level. We ought then to inquire as to the nature, the demands and the aims of politics, in order to act as Christians and as persons conscious of the excellence and, at the same time, the difficulties and risks which politics entails.

2. Politics is the use of legitimate authority *in order to attain the common good of society*: a common good which, as the Second Vatican Council declares, embraces "the sum of those conditions of social life by which individuals, families and groups can achieve complete and efficacious fulfillment" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 74). Political activity ought therefore to be carried out *in a spirit of service*. My predecessor Pope Paul VI rightly affirmed that "politics is a demanding way of living the Christian commitment to serve others" (*Octogesima Adveniens*, 46).

Hence, Christians who engage in politics - and who wish to do so as Christians - must act selflessly, not seeking their own advantage, or that of their group or party, but the good of one and all, and consequently, in the first place, that of the less fortunate members of society. In the struggles of life, which can at times be merciless and cruel, not a few are "crushed" and are inevitably cast aside. Among these I cannot fail to mention those who are imprisoned. On 9 July last I

visited some of them for the celebration of their Jubilee. On that occasion, following a custom of earlier Jubilee Years, I asked the leaders of countries to make "a gesture of clemency towards all those in prison" which would be "a clear sign of sensitivity to their condition". Moved by the many appeals that come to me from throughout the world, I renew today that appeal, in the conviction that such a gesture would be an encouragement to prisoners on their path of personal renewal and an incentive to their sincere acceptance of the values of justice.

Justice must indeed be the fundamental concern of political leaders: a justice which is not content to apportion to each his own, but one which aims at creating conditions of *equal opportunity* among citizens, and therefore favouring those who, for reasons of social status or education or health, risk being left behind or relegated to the lowest places in society, without possibility of deliverance.

This is the scandal of the affluent society of today's world, in which *the rich grow ever richer*, since wealth produces wealth, and *the poor grow ever poorer*, since poverty tends to additional poverty. Not only is this scandal found within individual nations, but it also has aspects which extend well beyond their borders. Today, especially, with the phenomenon of the globalization of markets, the rich and developed nations tend to improve their economic status further, while the poor countries - with the exception of some in the process of a promising development - tend to sink into ever more grievous forms of poverty.

3. I think with profound distress of those areas of the world *afflicted by endless wars and hostilities*, by endemic hunger and by terrible diseases. Many of you share my concern for this state of affairs which, from a Christian and a human point of view, represents the most serious sin of injustice found in the modern world. It must therefore deeply disturb the conscience of Christians today, especially those who, since they guide the political, economic and financial mechanisms of the world, are in a position to determine - for better or for worse - the destiny of peoples.

Truly *there needs to be a greater spirit of solidarity in the world*, as a means of overcoming the selfishness of individuals and nations. Only in this way will it be possible to curb the pursuit of political power and economic wealth with no reference to other values. In a now globalized world, in which the market, which of itself has a positive influence on human freedom and creativity in the economic sector (cf. *Centesimus Annus*, 42), nonetheless tends to be severed from all moral considerations and to take as its sole norm the law of maximum profit, those Christians who feel themselves called by God to political life have the duty - quite difficult yet very necessary - *to conform the laws of the "unbridled" market to the laws of justice and solidarity*. Only in this way can we ensure a peaceful future for our world and remove the root causes of conflicts and wars: *peace is the fruit of justice*.

4. I would like to speak in a particular way to those of you who have the very delicate task of formulating and approving laws: a task which brings man close to God, the Supreme Legislator, from whose Eternal Law the validity and the obligatory force of every other law is ultimately derived. This is precisely the meaning of the dictum that *positive law cannot contradict the natural law*, the latter being nothing other than the expression of the primary and essential norms regulating the moral life and consequently the characteristics, the most profound requirements and the loftiest values of the human person. As I have already had occasion to state in the Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, "the basis of these values cannot be provisional and changeable 'majority' opinions, but only the acknowledgment of an objective moral law which,

as the 'natural law' written in the human heart, is the obligatory point of reference for civil law itself" (No. 70).

This means that laws, whatever the areas in which the legislator intervenes or is obliged to intervene, must always respect and promote human persons - in all the variety of their spiritual, material, personal, family and social needs. Hence a law which does not respect the right to life - from conception to natural death - of every human being, whatever his or her condition - healthy or ill, still in the embryonic stage, elderly or close to death - *is not a law in harmony with the divine plan*. Consequently, Christian legislators may neither contribute to the formulation of such a law nor approve it in parliamentary assembly, although, where such a law already exists, *it is licit for them to propose amendments which would diminish its adverse effects*. The same must be said with regard to all laws which would do harm to the family, striking at its unity and its indissolubility, or which would give legal validity to a union between persons, including those of the same sex, who demand the same rights as the family founded upon marriage between a man and a woman.

Certainly in today's pluralistic society Christian lawmakers are confronted by ideas of life and by laws and requests for legalization which run contrary to their own conscience. Christian prudence, the virtue proper to Christian politicians, will make clear to them how they should act so as not to fall short, on the one hand, of the demands of their correctly formed conscience, and not to fail, on the other hand, in their duty as legislators. For Christians today, it is not a question of fleeing the world in which God's call has placed them, but rather of bearing witness to their own faith and being faithful to their own principles in the difficult and ever new situations which mark the world of politics.

5. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, the times in which God has granted us to live are in many ways dark and filled with difficulties, for they are times in which the very future of humanity is at stake in the new millennium opening up before us. In many men and women today fear and uncertainty prevail: where are we going?; what will be humanity's fate in the next century?; where are the extraordinary scientific discoveries of recent years, especially in the fields of biology and genetics, leading us? We are conscious of being merely at the beginning of a journey, but we do not know where it will take us and whether it will bring benefit or harm to the men and women of the twenty-first century.

As Christians living in these formidable and yet wonderful times, we share in the fears, the uncertainties and the questioning of our contemporaries. Yet we are not pessimistic about the future, for we have the certainty that Jesus Christ is the Lord of history, and in the Gospel we find the light which illumines our way, even in moments of difficulty and darkness.

An encounter with Christ changed your life one day, and now you have wished to renew the splendour of that encounter by making this pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul. To the extent that you persevere in this close bond with Christ, through personal prayer and committed participation in the life of the Church, he, the Living One, will continue to pour out upon you the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth and love, the strength and the light which all of us need.

With an act of wholehearted and steadfast faith, renew your fidelity to Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, and make his Gospel the guide of your thought and of your life. In this way you will be in today's society that yeast of new life which humanity needs in order to build a more just and fraternal future, a future open to the civilization of love.

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