



Orientation for the Christian citizens' participation **Catholics ' commitment to political life**

Laics cannot abdicate from participation in politics

A constant teaching

1. The commitment of Christians in the world, in two thousand years of history, has been expressed in different ways. One of them has been the participation in political action: Christians, affirmed an ecclesiastical writer of the first centuries, "fulfill all their duties as citizens". The Church venerates among its saint's many men and women who have served God through their generous commitment to political and government activities. Among them, Saint Thomas More proclaimed Father of politicians, who witnessed to martyrdom the "inalienable dignity of conscience". Although he was subdued to various forms of psychological pressure, he rejected all compromise, and without abandoning "the constant fidelity to authority and the institutions" which distinguished him, he affirmed with his life and his death that **"man cannot be separated from God, nor the politics from moral "**.

The current democratic societies, in which all citizens are made participants of the management of the public issues in a climate of true freedom demand new and broader forms of participation in the public life by the citizens, Christians and not Christians. Indeed, everyone can contribute by voting the legislators and rulers and, in various ways, to the formation of political orientations and the legislative options which, according to them, favor the common good. Life in a democratic political system could not be truthfully developed without the active, responsible and generous participation of everyone, "although with diversity and complementarity of forms, levels, tasks, and responsibilities".

By fulfilling the common civil duties, "according to their Christian conscience", in

conformity with the values that are congruent with it, the faithful laics also develop their tasks of christianly encouraging the temporal order, respecting its nature and legitimate autonomy, and cooperating with others, citizens according to specific competence and under the own responsibility. Consequence of this fundamental teaching of the Second Vatican Council is that "faithful laics in no way can abdicate participation in "politics "; that is to say, in the varied economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural action, destined to promote organically and institutionally the common good», which includes the promotion and defense of goods such as public order and peace, freedom and equality, respect for human life and the environment, justice, solidarity, etc.

Some critical points in the current cultural and political debate

2. Civil society is now in a complex cultural process that marks the end of time and the uncertainty of the new one that emerges on the horizon. The great achievements of which we are spectators drive us to prove the positive path that humanity has made in the progress and acquisition of more humane living conditions. The greatest responsibility to developing countries is certainly a signal of great relief, which shows the increased sensitivity towards the common good. Next, to that, **it is not possible to silence, on the other hand, on the serious dangers towards which some cultural tendencies seek to guide legislation and, consequently, the behaviors of future generations.**

A certain **cultural relativism** can be verified today, which becomes evident in the theorization and defense of the ethical pluralism, which determines the decay and dissolution of the reason and the principles of the natural moral law. Unfortunately, as a consequence of this trend, it is not uncommon to find in public statements claims that such ethical pluralism is the condition of the possibility of democracy. It happens so, on the one hand, citizens claim the most complete autonomy for their own moral preferences, while, on the other hand, legislators believe that they respect that freedom by formulating laws that dispense from the principles of natural ethics, limiting themselves to condescension with certain cultural orientations or transitory moral, as if all possible conceptions of life were of equal value. At the same time, invoking deceptively the tolerance, a good part of the citizens – including Catholics – are asked to renounce to contribute to the social and political life of their own countries, according to the conception of the person and the common good that they consider humanely true and fair, through the legal means that the democratic legal order makes available to all members of the political community. The history of the twentieth century is proof enough that the reason is on the side of those citizens who consider false the relativistic thesis, according to which there is no moral rule, rooted in the very nature of the human being, in whose all conception of man, common good and the State has to be submitted to judgment.

3. This relativistic conception of pluralism has nothing to do with the **legitimate freedom of the Catholic citizens to choose** between the political opinions compatible with the faith and the natural moral law, which, according to their criteria, is conformed according to the demands of the common good. Political freedom is not and cannot be based on the relativistic idea that all conceptions about man's good are equally true and have the same value, but on the fact that political activities point towards the extremely concrete realization of the true human and social good in a well-defined historical, geographical, economic, technological and cultural context. The plurality of the orientations and solutions, which must, in any case, be morally acceptable, arises precisely from the concretization of the particular facts and the diversity of the circumstances. It is not the Church's job to formulate concrete solutions – and still less unique solutions – for temporal matters, which God has left to the free and responsible judgment of each one. However, the Church has the right and duty to pronounce moral judgments on temporal realities when faith or moral law requires it. If the Christian should "recognize the legitimate plurality of temporal opinions", **he is also called to dissent from a conception of pluralism in the key of moral relativism, which is harmful to the same democratic life**, because it needs true and solid foundations, this is, of ethical principles which, by their nature and foundational role of social life, are not "negotiable".

At the level of concrete political militancy, it is important to note that the contingent character of some options in social matters, the fact that diverse strategies are often morally possible to realize or guarantee the same substantial value of fund, the possibility of interpreting in a different way some basic principles of the political theory, and the technical complexity of many of the political problems, explain the fact that can be given to several parties in which the Catholics can militarily exercise, particularly by the parliamentary representation, their right-duty to participate in the construction of the civic life of their country. This obvious verification cannot be confused, however, with an indistinct pluralism in the choice of moral principles and the substantial values to which reference is made. The legitimate plurality of temporal options keeps the matrix from which the commitment of Catholics in politics comes, which makes direct reference to Christian moral and social doctrine. On this teaching Catholic laics are obliged to always confront each other to be certain that their participation in political life is characterized by a coherent responsibility towards the temporal realities.

The Church is aware that the way of democracy, although it certainly better expresses the direct participation of citizens in political options, is only made possible when it is founded on a straight conception of the person. This is a principle on which Catholics cannot accept compromises, otherwise, the testimony of the Christian faith in the world and the unity and internal coherence of the faithful would be diminished. The democratic structure on which a modern state seeks to build itself would be extremely fragile if it did not put the centrality of the person as to its foundation. The respect towards the person is what makes

democratic participation possible. As the Second Vatican Council teaches, the guardianship "of the rights of each person is a necessary condition for citizens, as individuals or as members of associations, to be able to participate actively in the life and the government of the public issues".

4. From here the complex network of current problems is extended, which cannot be compared with the themes treated in past centuries. The scientific conquest, in effect, has allowed the achieving of objectives that shake the conscience and impose the need to find solutions able to respect, coherently and solidly, the ethical principles. It is assisted instead of legislative attempts which, without worrying about the consequences that arise for the existence and the future of the people in the formation of the culture and the social behaviors, propose to destroy the principle of the intangibility of human life. Catholics, in this serious circumstance, have the right and the duty to intervene to remember the deepest sense of life and the responsibility that everyone has before it. John Paul II, in line with the constant teaching of the Church, has reiterated that those who engage directly in legislative action have the "precise obligation to oppose" to any law that violates human life. For them, as for all Catholics, it is worth not being able to participate in campaigns of opinion in favor of such laws, and none of them is allowed to support them with their vote. This does not prevent, as John Paul II teaches in the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* on the subject of the case where it is not possible to completely prevent an abortion law in force or that it is to be put to the vote, that "a parliamentarian, whose absolute personal opposition to abortion is clear and notorious to all, can lawfully offer its support to proposals aimed at limiting the damage of that law and thus reduce the negative effects in the field of culture and public morality.'

In such a context, it must be added that the well-formed Christian conscience does not allow anyone to favor with the own vote the realization of a political program or the adoption of a particular law containing alternative or contrary proposals to the fundamental contents of faith and morality. Since the truths of faith constitute an inseparable unity, it is not logical to isolate only one of its contents to the detriment of the whole Catholic doctrine. The political commitment in favor of an isolated aspect of the social doctrine of the Church is not enough to satisfy the responsibility of the search for the common good in its entirety. Nor can the Catholic delegate in others the Christian commitment that comes from the Gospel of Jesus Christ, so that the truth about man and the world can be announced and realized.

When the political action has to do with moral principles that do not admit derogations, exceptions or any compromise, it is when the commitment of the Catholics becomes more evident and charged with responsibility. In the face of these fundamental and inalienable ethical demands, **believers must know that the essence of the moral order, that concerns the integral good of the person, is at stake.** This is the case of civil laws in matters of abortion and euthanasia (that should not be confused with the therapeutic cruelty, which is

morally legitimate), which must protect the primary right to life from its conception to its natural term. In the same way, we must insist on the duty to respect and protect the rights of the human embryo. Analogously, **guardianship and promotion of the family should be safeguarded**, founded on monogamous marriage between persons of the opposite sex and protected in their unity and stability, the face of modern divorce laws. **The family cannot be legally equated with other forms of coexistence**, nor can they receive, as much, legal recognition. So too, **the freedom of parents in the education of their children is an inalienable right**, also recognized in the international declarations of human rights. In the same way, it should be thought in the social guardianship of minors and the release of victims of modern forms of slavery (think, for example, drugs and the exploitation of prostitution). The right to religious freedom and the development of an economy that is at the service of the person and the common good, in respect of social justice, human solidarity and subsidiarity, cannot be left out of this list, according to which the rights of the people, of the families and associations, as well as their exercise must be recognized, respected and promoted". Finally, we must contemplate the great issue of peace among the above examples. An ideological vision sometimes tends to secularize the value of peace while, in other cases, it is yielded to a summary of ethical judgment, forgetting the complexity of the reasons in question. **Peace is always "the work of justice and the effect of charity"**; it demands the radical and absolute rejection of violence and terrorism, and requires a constant and vigilant commitment by those who have a political responsibility.

Conclusion

5. The Second Vatican Council exhorts the faithful to "faithfully fulfill their temporal duties, always guided by the evangelical spirit." The Christians are mistaken in pretexting that we do not have here a permanent city, because we seek the future one; they consider that they can neglect the temporal tasks, without realizing that the faith itself is a motive that obliges them to the most perfect fulfillment of all them, according to the personal vocation of each one. "Rejoice the faithful Christians "to be able to exert all their temporal activities making a vital synthesis of the human effort, familiar, professional, scientific or technical effort, with the religious values, under whose highest hierarchy everything cooperates to the glory of God".