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Three Dimensions of Catholic Political Participation: Dignity, Secularity, and Witness

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Abstract: The laity, however, are given this special vocation, that is, to make the Church present and fruitful in those places and circumstances where it is only through them that she can become the salt of the earth. Thus, every lay person, through those gifts given to him, is at once the witness and the living instrument of the mission of the Church itself “according to the measure of Christ’s bestowal” (Eph. 4: 7) (*Lumen Gentium*, 33).

Key words: politics, democracy, participation, witness, *Gaudium et Spes*

Introduction

Political participation, particularly the strong encouragement for the Catholic laity to participate in political affairs, is the central theme of *Gaudium et Spes*, part II chapter IV. This teaching on political life in *Gaudium et Spes* represents one of the finer achievements of the Second Vatican Council and it has emerged as the issue of greatest urgency for the Church in the modern world. This teaching follows the lead of Popes Pius XII¹ and John XXIII in proposing

¹ “We were anxious, Beloved Sons and Daughters, to take the occasion of Christmastide to point out along what lines a democracy befitting human dignity can, in harmony with the law of nature and the designs of God as manifested in Revelation, secure happy results. Indeed, we are deeply convinced of the supreme importance of this problem for the peaceful progress of mankind,” Pius XII, *Christmas Message*, 51 (New York: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1944). See John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, nn. 60, 67, 77.

a respect for human rights based upon the dignity of the human person and an endorsement of a democratic aspect to politics in the modern world, especially to counter the growing menace of totalitarian political ideologies. The document lays out an agenda for the Church to encourage the renewal or restoration of political order along democratic lines and to “invigorate basic convictions about the true nature of politics: its proper end, right use, and limits.”² Most of all, it establishes the crucial role of the Church as “the sign and safeguard of the transcendence of the human person” in such an order.³

It is remarkable that such an achievement was almost an afterthought, for this section on politics was not initially a part of the initial schema; it was added between the sessions of the council.⁴ It is the shortest of the sections. The other sections devoted to “problems of special urgency” seemed to have in fact greater urgency. As we know, the section on family and marriage came out with a footnote promising that the most controversial issue of the time, artificial birth control, would be addressed by a special papal commission. The Church and the world eagerly awaited this finding, and *Humanae Vitae*, issued in 1968, simply intensified and furthered the urgency of the issue which is debated to this day, if not simply ignored by many faithful, scorned by the secular world, and finessed with theological subtleties by the theologians. Of course, Pope John Paul II has done much to defend and amplify the teaching of *Humanae Vitae*. He has shown its inner connection to *Gaudium et Spes* and refuted the false alternatives in *Reflections upon Humanae Vitae*; he has developed the theological anthropology of *Gaudium et Spes* into a theology of the body revealing the essential humanity of a consistent respect for the virility and fertility of spousal partners; and finally, he demonstrated the vital links between this openness to life and the Gospel of Life as well as those between the contraceptive mentality and the culture of death. Similarly, the chapter on peace and the community of nations, received a boost because of the pressing issues surrounding the Vietnam war and peace movements as well as the special problems of deterrence and weapons of mass destruction. Recent events in Iraq continue to bring these issues to the forefront of discussion. The chapter on economics has also had reasons for special attention, and the continuing theme of economic equity found synergy in the work of John XXIII, continued apace in the letters of Paul VI and John Paul II. Perhaps the section on culture has not had quite the same urgency, but nevertheless it

² *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 73; John P. Hittinger, “*Gaudium et Spes* and the Importance of Political Philosophy,” *Pontifical College Josephinum Journal of Theology* 20, no. 2 (2013) (Aquinas and the Philosophical Training of Theologians): 279–306.

³ *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 76; John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1979), § 13 and John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1991), 3, 38, 55.

⁴ See Herbert Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967–1969), five volumes, Vol. 5. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

has received due attention, especially in the issue of Catholic education. Chapter four, on the life of political community, the afterthought of the council's session, became a central theme for Pope John Paul II throughout his many travels and his addresses to international bodies and to heads of state. As a philosopher and bishop, Karol Wojtyła was deeply aware of the issue of participation throughout social forms, including the political: "The central problem of life for humanity in our times, perhaps in all times, is this: participation or alienation? This problem seems to take on sharper contours today. It is also one that is very much alive in people's minds."⁵ Why is participation so crucial to political life in general, and also for Catholic presence in the modern world? How is this role for Catholics in the modern world to be understood and lived?

Participation and the Dignity of the Person

What is the meaning and importance of political participation in *Gaudium et Spes*? The theme is anticipated in the sections on culture and economics. The council fathers call for efforts to promote greater participation in the benefits of culture by groups often left out, such as workers, farmers, or women. The lack of fundamental culture, literacy, is an impediment to cooperation in "promotion of the common good."⁶ So culture is both an intrinsic good, as well as an instrumental one leading to political participation. The chapter on economics has extensive references to the good of participation of workers in the economic activities of the factory or corporation.⁷ This limited participation must be complemented by political participation. Political participation includes first and foremost, an active role in shaping the political sphere and public. Second, participation means that all should benefit materially and spiritually from the common good. Third, the extent of participation ranges from participation in elections for holders of public office, to fundamental vote for the shape of the constitution and the arrangement of office. Fourth, political participation signifies the intrinsic "bias" of politics towards democracy, an idea originating in

⁵ Karol Wojtyła, "Participation or Alienation," in *Person and Community. Selected Essays* (Catholic Thought from Lublin) (New York: P. Land, 1993), 206. See John Hittinger, "Alienation," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* Supplement 2012–2013, edited by Robert Fastiggi, 1, 55–56 (Washington, D.C.: Gale Cengage Learning, 2013).

⁶ *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 60

⁷ *Ibid.*, n. 65—the largest possible number of people have an active share in directing development; *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 68—the active sharing of all in the administration and profits of the enterprise in ways properly determined is to be promoted, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 71—private property is a condition for civil liberty).

Plato and Aristotle's *Politics* and culminating in the Thomistic tradition, for example, transmission theory of political authority, brought to fruition by Belarmino.

The most fundamental reason for the endorsement of political participation is the dignity of the human person. This truth, of course, is fundamental to the thrust of the council in general and *Gaudium et Spes* in particular:

At the same time, however, there is a growing awareness of the exalted dignity proper to the human person, since he stands above all things, and his rights and duties are universal and inviolable. Therefore, there must be made available to all men everything necessary for leading a life truly human.⁸

These conditions for a human life range from basic necessities of life to education and the search for God. The crucial passage concerning the light that Christ shines on the dignity of the human, revealing man to man himself⁹ provides an even deeper and broader foundation for human dignity. Pope John Paul II connects the Gospel itself with the respect for dignity and the promotion of human rights:

in this light, *and only in this light*, does it concern itself with everything else: the human rights of the individual, and in particular of the 'working class,' the family and education, the duties of the State, the ordering of national and international society, economic life, culture, war and peace, and respect for life from the moment of conception until death.¹⁰

Common to the areas of concern and the respect for rights may be found the call to participate in the life of society: "the will to play one's role in common endeavors should be everywhere encouraged. Praise is due to those national procedures which allow the largest possible number of citizens to participate in public affairs with genuine freedom."¹¹ Although the council fathers outline a brief and sober list of basic civil rights such as free assembly, association, expression of opinion, and religious profession, they converge on the critical role of participation for each person and citizen. In an interesting turn of phrase the protection of these rights are said to be "a necessary condition so that citizens, individually or collectively, can take an active part in the life and government of the political association."¹² In other words, these rights are to be understood as something more than a system for establishing a realm of privacy, but rather

⁸ *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 26.

⁹ *Ibid.*, n. 22.

¹⁰ John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1991), 54. See the section on rights in his *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Knopf Publishing Group, 1994).

¹¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 31.

¹² [*cives actuose participare in rei publicae vitae*], *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 73.

they serve as a reminder for the crucial importance of social and political participation as in keeping with human nature and dignity.¹³

This strong encouragement for political participation means that Catholics should fully embrace their role as citizens. As citizens they are invited to use the normal or regular means of government and to make use of the privileges and rights afforded to any citizen. Within such means they are obligated to vote for what is the right thing to do, to embody Catholic conscience in political form in policy, law, and representation. The entire account turns upon that simple but profound notion of conscience in politics: the proper autonomy of the political order frees the Christian citizen to act on his/her “own responsibility” guided by “the dictates of a Christian conscience.” The confusion surrounding this term, conscience, or the unwillingness to abide its dictate, has come to the point of special urgency.

The crisis led Cardinal Ratzinger to issue the *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*.¹⁴ He identifies the confusion that lies at the very heart of its achievement. He writes that “the rightful autonomy of the political or civil sphere” is a value attained and recognized by the Catholic Church:

For Catholic moral doctrine, the rightful autonomy of the political or civil sphere from that of religion and the Church—but *not from that of morality*—is a value that has been attained and recognized by the Catholic Church and belongs to inheritance of contemporary civilization.¹⁵

Prior to Vatican II the full differentiation of the political, a relative autonomy, had not been decisively attained nor fully recognized. Of course, the achievement is the fruition of centuries of development in Catholic doctrine and papal social teaching and the outcome of the important work of the prior fifty years in Catholic political thought by such thinkers as Maritain, Simon, Rommen, Sturzo, Murray and colleagues,¹⁶ and many others. Thus, it consolidates

¹³ The passage in full reads as follows: “The present keener sense of human dignity has given rise in many parts of the world to attempts to bring about a politico-juridical order which will give better protection to the rights of the person in public life. These include the right freely to meet and form associations, the right to express one’s own opinion and to profess one’s religion both publicly and privately. The protection of the rights of a person is indeed a necessary condition so that citizens, individually or collectively, can take an active part in the life and government of the state.”

¹⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, November 24, 2002, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20021124_politica_en.html.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, n. 6.

¹⁶ See my article “Jacques Maritain and Yves R. Simon’s Use of Thomas Aquinas in Their Justification of Democracy,” in *Thomas Aquinas and His Legacy*, ed. David Gallagher (Wa-

these gains and makes them available to Catholics as they face new conditions and circumstances in the modern world. Its urgency is also gathered from the very need to issue such a *Doctrinal Note* and it is stated explicitly that “the presentation of the fruits of the spiritual, intellectual and moral heritage of Catholicism in terms understandable to modern culture is a task of great urgency today, in order to avoid also a kind of Catholic cultural diaspora.”¹⁷ The *Doctrinal Note* was issued to confront explicitly the widespread error of a liberal denial of morality in the political realm, thus failing to open the doors of politics to Christ. The great achievement pertaining to the recognition of the proper differentiation and separation of Church and state became obscured by a false appeal to pluralism, or worse religious indifference, leading to the position that morality has no claim on political life and action. Many Catholics pushed to side the light of moral conscience. Cardinal Ratzinger warned Catholics to avoid being absorbed into the dominant liberal culture, but also to avoid a “diaspora” by the failure to engage modern culture and politics. The Catholic presence must be both light and salt. The liberal error loses the flavor of salt, and others may just withdraw from political order and fail to bring light to the world. The broad purpose of the intervention was to encourage meaningful participation in the political sphere, retaining the distinctive witness of Catholic conscience.

Participation and Secularity

For Catholics to successfully engage the cultural and political challenges of the day, the members of the Church must also appreciate the theology of the laity that provides the wider context for the Ratzinger intervention. The life of the citizen as such pertains to a task assigned to the lay people: “the laity, however, are given this special vocation: to make the Church present and fruitful in those places and circumstances where it is only through them that she can become the salt of the earth.”¹⁸ Indeed “secularity” is the very mark of the layman—“secular duties and activities belong properly to laymen” and they should work according

shington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 149–72; John P. Hittinger, *Liberty, Wisdom, and Grace: Thomism and Modern Democratic Theory* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002).

¹⁷ *Doctrinal Note*, 7.

¹⁸ II Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964, 33, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

to the “laws proper to each discipline” and yet seek to inscribe the divine law into the very life of the earthly city—by way of their own conscientious action.¹⁹ The very secular work of the layman accomplishes both a religious mission and a temporal mission, to the benefit of both:

Even by their secular activity they must aid one another to greater holiness of life, so that the world may be filled with the spirit of Christ and may the more effectively attain its destiny in justice, in love and in peace. The laity enjoys a principle role in the universal fulfillment of this task. Therefore, by their competence in secular disciplines and by their activity, interiorly raised up by grace, let them work earnestly in order that created goods through human labor, technical skill and civil culture may serve the utility of all men according to the plan of the creator and the light of his word [...]. Thus, through the members of the Church, will Christ increasingly illuminate the whole of human society with his saving light.²⁰

It is part of the universal call to holiness that the layman receives such an important new emphasis according to Vatican II. No longer is the notion of holiness to be reserved for the priests, the religious. And yet the layman is not called to holiness by a secondary imitation of the religious by a flight from the world or by an explicitly ecclesiastical mission; rather it is through unity of life, unity of religious devotion and professional energy, the former illuminating and purifying the latter, that the layman achieves holiness of life. It may be called a sanctification of the world, a sanctification of the temporal order itself, in terms of the proper finalities and autonomy of the temporal order itself.

The Church will fulfill this mission, this benefit to the earthly city, not by assuming temporal power or by using the means proper to the earthly city such as coercion or political power. Rather, through the very means proper to the Gospel, through the inspiration of conscience and through a sacramental approach to life. The laity can become the source for a new politics supporting the dignity of the human person because of their unity of life. It is the same person who is a member of the Church and who is also a member of the political community. The burden of unity falls upon the individual person, the individual

¹⁹ Thanks to the lay faithful, “the presence and mission of the Church in the world is realized in a special way in the variety of charisms and ministries which belong to the laity. Secularity is the true and distinctive mark of the lay person and of lay spirituality, which means that the laity strive to evangelize the various sectors of family, social, professional, cultural and political life.” John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1999), 44. Hereafter *Ecclesia in America*.

²⁰ *Lumen Gentium*, n. 36; on the positive meaning of “secularity” for the laity see Pope John Paul II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (Washington D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1989). Hereafter *Christifideles Laici*, 9, 15, 17.

Christian, who is a member of both societies.²¹ But such unity does not come without effort and spiritual growth. Catholics after the Council have simply failed to understand the principles and conditions for political life, or they have been unwilling to live them out. The Council, issuing no anathemas, finds the grave error on the side of Catholic witness, or its failure. “This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age.”²² A Christian may not claim a warrant to neglect or to shirk their earthly duties because of a concern with the otherworldly. In fact, such a Christian “jeopardizes his eternal salvation.” But neither should they separate temporal matters from the light of faith. The council fathers call for Christian laymen to gather into a “vital synthesis with religious values” all their earthly activities—humane, domestic, professional, social and technical enterprises. Secularity must be permeated by the radical newness of life derived from baptism:

The lay faithful’s position in the Church, then, comes to be fundamentally defined by their newness in Christian life and distinguished by their secular character. The images taken from the gospel of salt, light and leaven, although indiscriminately applicable to all Jesus’ disciples, are specifically applied to the lay faithful. They are particularly meaningful images because they speak not only of the deep involvement and the full participation of the lay faithful in the affairs of the earth, the world and the human community, but also and above all, they tell of the radical newness and unique character of an involvement and participation which has as its purpose the spreading of the Gospel that brings salvation.²³

In this passage John Paul II brings together the two essential conditions for a fruitful participation of Catholics in political life, namely, an appreciation for the value of the secularity of the lay apostolate, but also, and more crucially, the newness of baptism and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

²¹ John P. Hittinger, “The Cooperation of Church and State: Maritain’s Argument from the Unity of the Person,” in *Reassessing the Liberal State: Reading Maritain’s Man and the State*, ed. John P. Hittinger and Timothy Fuller (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 2001).

²² “This council exhorts Christians, as citizens of two cities, to strive to discharge their earthly duties conscientiously and in response to the Gospel spirit. They are mistaken who, knowing that we have here no abiding city but seek one which is to come, think that they may therefore shirk their earthly responsibilities. For they are forgetting that by the faith itself they are more obliged than ever to measure up to these duties, each according to his proper vocation. Nor, on the contrary, are they any less wide of the mark who think that religion consists in acts of worship alone and in the discharge of certain moral obligations, and who imagine they can plunge themselves into earthly affairs in such a way as to imply that these are altogether divorced from the religious life,” *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 43.

²³ *Christifideles Laici*, n. 15.

Participation and Witness

The newness of baptism gives to each a prophetic witness to the truth of Christ: “the lay faithful are given the ability and responsibility to accept the gospel in faith and to proclaim it in word and deed, without hesitating to courageously identify and denounce evil.”²⁴ The prophetic role of the Catholic should become manifest most of all in the realm of political affairs. Pope John Paul II said that the laity are “called to allow the newness and the power of the gospel to shine out everyday in their family and social life, as well as to express patiently and courageously in the contradictions of the present age their hope of future glory even ‘through the framework of their secular life.’”²⁵ In an age of relativism and consumerism, when the voice of conscience is regularly ignored or denied, the prophetic role of the laity becomes particularly important. Relativism is a dangerous way to explain toleration and respect for the dignity of the person. Indeed, the very foundation of the modern state and its legitimacy to protect the rights of the person rest upon morality. Cardinal Ratzinger mentioned the hostile and “disingenuous” use of the rhetoric of toleration which seeks to ban Christian conviction or even moral conviction from having an impact on public reason and public action. The appeal to conscience is not an act of sectarian or confessional politics because conscience has a source in rational moral law and deliberation. Catholics for their part must understand the realm for autonomy and legitimate freedom of opinion concerns for the most part the question of means and technical solutions to the end of human flourishing. Cardinal Ratzinger acknowledged that there can exist a plurality of parties and opinions based on the development of different strategies for achieving our goals, even from a range of interpretation of the fundamental principles, and of course a pluralism deriving from different technical solutions to a given set of problems. But he says that one cannot compromise the fundamental dignity of the person. This not only threatens the foundation of free government and democratic regimes, but it also jeopardizes the integrity and unity of Catholic life. To compromise on such basic principles would threaten the witness of faith and the “unity and interior coherence” of faith. In other words, Catholics are living a lie when they profess the faith on Sunday and act in direct opposition to it in the political arena.

There cannot be two parallel lives in their existence: on the one hand, the so-called spiritual life, with its values and demands; and on the other, the so-called secular life, that is, life in a family, at work, in social relationships, in the responsibilities of public life and in culture. The branch, engrafted to the vine

²⁴ *Ibid.*, n. 15.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, n. 14.

which is Christ, bears its fruit in every sphere of existence and activity. In fact, every area of the lay faithful's lives, as different as they are, enters into the plan of God, who desires that these very areas be the "places in time" where the love of Christ is revealed and realized for both the glory of the Father and service of others. Every activity, every situation, every precise responsibility—as, for example, skill and solidarity in work, love and dedication in the family and the education of children, service to society and public life and the promotion of truth in the area of culture—are the occasions ordained by Providence for a "continuous exercise of faith, hope and charity."²⁶

The deepest appeal made in this doctrinal note is that of understanding political action as form of Christian witness and a way of living that is coherent. So in a way, we must say that political success is not the primary issue here at all; the failure of Catholic political action is a failure of personal integrity and a failure to show forth the truth of God's good creation and the redemption of Christ. Invoking Thomas More at the outset of the document, Cardinal Ratzinger clearly means to convey the notion that unity of life and witness to faith are the primary values at stake in political action. And that is not to say that we do not strive to "win" elections or guarantee that certain candidate or party is victorious. But the venture is more fundamentally about integrity and witness; as John Paul II explained, "whenever men or women heed the call of truth, their conscience then guides their actions reliably towards good. Precisely because of the witness which he bore, even at the price of his life, to the primacy of truth over power, St. Thomas More is venerated as an imperishable example of moral integrity."²⁷

Political action is a form of Christian witness if it is based upon a way of living that is consistent with the faith and coherent in its witness. The life and death of St. Thomas More shows us that unity of life and witness to faith are the primary values at stake in political action. It is a mode of evangelization, by which the Catholic citizen gives witness to fundamental truths concerning the dignity of the human person and the goodness, justice and mercy of the Triune God.

The challenges for such political participation to be a true witness are very great: "What is expected from the laity is a great creative effort in activities and works demonstrating a life in harmony with the Gospel."²⁸ Such effort must be prepared through formation of the laity. What is demanded of the lay person is a "vital synthesis" of "humane, domestic, professional, social and technical enterprises" with religious values, under whose "supreme direction all things are harmonized unto God's glory." In *Apostolicum Actuositatem* the formation of lay

²⁶ Ibid., n. 59.

²⁷ John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter Issued Motu Proprio Proclaiming Saint Thomas More Patron of Statesmen and Politicians* (October, 21, 2000), 1.

²⁸ *Ecclesia in America*, 44.

people requires “an integral human education.”²⁹ The foundation for this education must be “living by faith in the divine mystery of creation and redemption.” The knowledge of revelation through scripture and tradition must come first in the education for lay apostolate. In addition, the lay faithful need to be educated in theology, ethics, and philosophy.³⁰ Most of all, the lay people need “an exact knowledge of the Church’s social teaching.”³¹ Lay apostolate is the “fruit of a transfigured existence and a commitment to transforming the world in accordance with the Gospel.”³² All things are made new through Christ present in the Eucharist—the faithful are transfigured and can transform the world. The call of the lay faithful to apostolate through participation in political life is ultimately to be the fruit of the Eucharist. The world is good and has a “proper autonomy” deriving from its creaturely status. False autonomy asserts that created things do not depend on God, and that man can use them without any reference to their Creator. The proper framework for apostolate is to understand the proper origin and end of creation in the God. Without the creator, the creature is lost and becomes unintelligible. The Eucharist therefore leads us to a deep affirmation of the goodness of God’s creation. Through the Eucharist the lay faithful bring to the altar God’s good creation, now wounded by sin, but redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ. John Paul says that the Eucharist should “spur us on our journey through history and plants a seed of living hope in our daily commitment the work before us.”³³ As participants in the Eucharist the faithful develop a greater sense of responsibility for the world. Summarizing the rich detail of Vatican documents, the pope mentions as few key areas for our special concern—to defend human life from conception to its natural end, to attend to the plight of the poor, and the urgent need to work for peace, justice, and solidarity.

Conclusion

The call to greater social and political participation explained in *Gaudium et Spes*, Part II must be understood in the context of *Gaudium et Spes*, Part I.

²⁹ II Vatican Council, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Auctositatem*, November 18, 1965, n. 29, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html. Hereafter *Apostolicam Auctositatem*.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Christifideles Laici*, n. 61.

³² John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (April 17, 2003), 20, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/special_features/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_20030417_ecclesia_eucharistia_en.html.

³³ *Ibid.*

Pope John Paul II made it clear in his various writings how section § 22, “Christ reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear” helps the Church to realize her role in the modern world in politics, and in the other areas of urgent concern, family, culture, economics, and international relations. There are three aspects of authentic participation that must be understood and realized in practice: (1) the respect for human dignity and the rights that flow from that dignity; (2) the laity’s distinctive feature of secularity and engagement with temporal affairs understood in its theological significance, namely as the sign of God the creator and redeemer, who has handed over the world to women and men, so that they may participate in the work of creation, free creation from the influence of sin and sanctify themselves in such work; and (3) the newness of baptism and the ongoing renewal of the mind and heart of the believer so as to be a witness to the truth and love of the divine Trinity. Such a venture will require the ongoing formation of the lay faithful and the ongoing implementation of Vatican II as envisioned by Cardinal Wojtyła in his book *Sources of Renewal*.³⁴ We need nothing less than a profound deepening awareness of faith and the renewal of attitudes in each member of the Church. Pope John Paul II said that we have entered a great moment in history, crossing the threshold of the Third Millennium. “A new state of affairs today both in the Church and in social, economic, political and cultural life, calls with a particular urgency for the action of the lay faithful.”³⁵ Using the gospel parable of the owner of the vineyard sending forth workers, John Paul II sets before our eyes the Lord’s vast vineyard and the multitude of persons, both women and men, who are called and sent forth by him to labor in it. “The vineyard is the whole world (cf. Mt 13:38) which is to be transformed according to the plan of God in view of the final coming of the Kingdom of God.”

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³⁴ Karol Wojtyła, *Sources of Renewal: The Implementation of the Second Vatican Council*. 1st U.S. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row), 1980.

³⁵ *Christifideles Laici*, n. 3.

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John P. Hittinger

Trois dimensions de l'engagement politique des catholiques : dignité, sécularité, témoignage

Résumé

Dans le présent article, j'étudie la question de l'engagement qui apparaît dans *Gaudium et Spes* en tant que nouvelle caractéristique essentielle de l'Enseignement catholique social. L'article examine aussi les raisons de l'intervention de la part de la Congrégation pour la Doctrine de la Foi/du cardinal Ratzinger en 2002 dans la matière de l'engagement. Elle a été exprimée dans la « Note doctrinale concernant certaines questions sur l'engagement et le comportement des catholiques dans la vie politique ». La clé, que l'on propose, permettant de comprendre l'engagement dans la vie des catholiques réside dans une approche convenable de l'apostolat laïc et du témoignage chrétien spécifique donné dans la vie politique.

Mots clés: politique, démocratie, engagement, témoignage, *Gaudium et Spes*

John P. Hittinger

Le tre dimensioni della partecipazione politica dei cattolici: dignità, secolarità, testimonianza

Sommario

Nel presente articolo mi occupo dello studio dell'argomento della partecipazione che appare nella *Gaudium et Spes* come caratteristica nuova essenziale della Dottrina Sociale della Chiesa Cattolica. L'articolo esamina anche le cause dell'intervento da parte della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede/del cardinale Ratzinger nel 2002 sulla questione della partecipazione. È stato espresso nella "Nota dottrinale circa alcune questioni riguardanti l'impegno e il comportamento dei cattolici nella vita politica". La chiave proposta per la comprensione della partecipazione nella vita dei cattolici sta nell'approccio appropriato all'apostolato laico e al genere specifico di testimonianza cristiana data nell'ordine politico.

Parole chiave: politica, democrazia, partecipazione, testimonianza, *Gaudium et Spes*