



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE 24TH PLENARY SESSION OF
THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY**

*Consistory Hall
Friday, 21 May 2010*

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

It is with joy that I welcome you all, Members and Consultors, participants in the 24th Plenary Assembly of the [Pontifical Council for the Laity](#). I extend my cordial greeting to the President, Cardinal Stanislaw Rylko, as I also thank him for the kind words he has expressed to me; to the Secretary, Bishop Josef Clemens, and to all those present. [Your Dicastery's](#) structure in which primarily lay people, coming from across the world and from very diverse contexts and backgrounds, work alongside Pastors offers a meaningful cross-section of the organic community of the Church. In her the common priesthood of the baptized faithful and the ordained priesthood put down their roots in the unique priesthood of Christ each in essentially different ways, but ordered one to the other. Now that we have almost reached the end of the [Year for Priests](#) we feel ourselves, to a heightened degree, to be grateful witnesses of the surprising and generous self-gift and dedication of the many men "conquered" by Christ and configured to him in the ordained priesthood. Day after day, they accompany the *christifideles laici* on their journey of faith, proclaiming the word of God, communicating his forgiveness and reconciliation with Him, calling them to prayer and offering as sustenance the Lord's Body and Blood. It is from this mystery of communion that the lay faithful draw the profound strength to be witnesses of Christ in the concrete reality and substance of their lives, in all of their activities and surroundings.

The theme of your Assembly: "Witnesses to Christ in the Political Community", takes on a special importance. Of course, the technical formation of politicians is not part of the Church's mission; various other institutions exist for this purpose. Rather, the Church's mission is to "pass moral judgments even in matters relating to politics, whenever the fundamental rights of man or the salvation of souls requires it.... [T]he only means it may use are those which are in accord with the Gospel and the welfare of all men according to the diversity of times and circumstances" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 76). The Church concentrates particularly on the formation of the disciples of Christ, in order that they may ever increasingly become witnesses of his Presence, any and everywhere. It is up to the lay faithful to demonstrate concretely in their personal and family life, in social, cultural and political life that the faith enables them to see reality in a new and profound way, and to transform it; that Christian hope broadens the limited horizon of mankind, expanding it towards the true loftiness of his being, towards God; that charity in truth is the most effective force that is capable of changing the world; that the Gospel gives a guarantee of freedom and a message of liberation; that the fundamental principles of the social doctrine of the Church such as the dignity of the human person, subsidiarity and solidarity are extremely relevant and valuable in order to support new paths of development in service to the whole person and to all humanity. It is also the duty of the laity to participate actively in political life, in a manner consistently in accordance with the Church's teaching, bringing their well-founded reasons and high ideals into the democratic debate, and into the search for a broad consensus among all those who care about the defense of life and freedom, the safeguarding of truth and the good of the family, solidarity with the needy and the crucial search for the common good. Christians do not seek political or cultural hegemony but, whatever their work, they are animated by the certainty that Christ is the cornerstone of every human structure (cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on some questions regarding The Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, 24 November 2002).

In taking up the words of my Predecessors, I too can affirm that politics is a very important field in which to exercise charity. It calls Christians to a strong commitment to citizenship, to building a good life in one's country, and likewise to an effective presence among the international community's institutions and programmes. There is a need for authentically Christian politicians but, even more so, for lay faithful who witness to Christ and the Gospel in the civil and political community. This demand must be reflected in the educational programmes of ecclesial communities and requires new forms of presence and support from Pastors. Christian membership in faith-related associations, ecclesial movements and new communities can provide a good school for these disciples and witnesses, sustained by the charismatic, communitarian, educational and missionary resources of these groups.

This is a demanding challenge. The times in which we live confront us with large and complex problems, and the social question has become an anthropological question at the same time. In the recent past, the ideological paradigms have been shattered that proposed to be a "scientific" response to that question. The spread of a confused cultural relativism and of a utilitarian and

hedonistic individualism weakens democracy and favours the dominance of strong powers. We must recover and reinvigorate authentic political wisdom; be demanding in what concerns our own sphere of competency; make discerning use of the research of the human sciences; face reality in all its aspects, going beyond any kind of ideological reductionism or utopian dream; show we are open to true dialogue and collaboration, bearing in mind that politics is also a complex art of equilibrium between ideals and interests, but never forgetting that the contribution of Christians can be effective only if knowledge of faith becomes knowledge of reality, the key to judgement and transformation. What is needed is a real "revolution of love". The new generations have immense demands and challenges before them in their personal and social life. Your Dicastery looks after them with special care, particularly through the World Youth Days, which have for 25 years been producing rich apostolic fruits among young people. Among these challenges is also the social and political commitment, founded not on partisan ideologies or interests but rather on the choice to serve man and the common good, in the light of the Gospel.

Dear friends, as I invoke abundant fruits from the Lord upon your work in this Assembly and upon your daily lives, I entrust each one of you, your families and communities to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Star of the new evangelization, and I wholeheartedly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you all.

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