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# Nationale und kulturelle Identität im Zeitalter der Globalisierung

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**On Citizen and Conscience:  
Political Participation in *Gaudium et Spes***

By John P. Hittinger

“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.”

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Doctrinal Note, November 24, 2002.

“With this Exhortation the lay faithful are invited to take up again and reread, meditate on and assimilate with renewed understanding and love, the rich and fruitful teaching of the Council.”

Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici: On the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay faithful in the Church and in the World*, December 30, 1988, no. 14.<sup>1</sup>

**I. Introduction – The Significance of Political Participation  
in *Gaudium et Spes***

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. I think that it is fair to say that the urgency of the issue was understated and its significance has been underappreciated. And I would venture to say that this teaching 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. Its achievement is understood by Cardinal Ratzinger in the recent “Doctrinal Note on some questions regarding the participation of Catholics in political life” when he says in summary fashion that “the rightful autonomy of the political or civil sphere” is a value attained and recog-

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<sup>1</sup> “We can say that in its rich variety of teaching the Second Vatican Council contains precisely all that ‘the Spirit says to the Churches’ with regard to the present phase of the history of salvation.” John Paul II., *On The Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and World*, no. 26; “The Second Vatican Council, whose teaching on the lay faithful, after twenty years, has taken on a surprisingly contemporary character and at times has carried prophetic significance: such teaching has the capacity of enlightening and guiding the responses that today must be given to new situations.” Pope John Paul II., *Christifideles Laici: On The Vocation And The Mission Of The Lay Faithful In The Church And In The World*, no. 2.

nized by the Catholic Church. Prior to Vatican II it had not been decisively attained nor fully recognized.<sup>2</sup> But 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 many others.<sup>3</sup> Thus, it consolidates 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.” (GS no. 7). While the “Doctrinal Note” was issued to confront explicitly the widespread error of a liberal denial of morality in the political realm, its broad purpose is to encourage meaningful participation in the political sphere, and some conservative Catholics have been sounding what appears to be a retreat from engaging contemporary political discourse, if I understand the project of Tracey Rowland or Robert Kraynak.<sup>4</sup> A conservative cultural diaspora may be as fruitless as the liberal denial of Catholic conscience. Hence the urgency at the present time is clear. Catholics are not successfully engaging the political challenge of the day.

A look at its place in the document may also bring to appreciate its special urgency today. This section of the document was not initially a part of the initial schema; it was added, almost an after thought, between the sessions of the council.<sup>5</sup> 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 waited 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

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<sup>2</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, November 24, 2002, no. 6.

<sup>3</sup> 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, David Gallagher, editor (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1994): 149–172. In John P. Hittinger, *Liberty, Wisdom, and Grace: Thomism and Modern Democratic Theory* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Tracey Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition After Vatican II* (Routledge, 2003); Robert P. Kraynak, *Christian Faith and Modern Democracy: God and Politics in the Fallen World* (2001).

<sup>5</sup> See Herbert Vorgrimler (ed.), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967–69), five volumes. v. 5. Pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world.

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 has received due attention, especially in the issue of Catholic education. But what of chapter four, on the life of political community, the after-thought of the council's session? Why ignored or obscured? Perhaps it was simply taken for granted. Perhaps it disappointed some others – it spelled out the living norm of most western nations, it affirms the role of nations, perhaps at the expense of internationalism.<sup>6</sup> Even its terms have created some confusion, such as state, nation, political body.

But its achievement is now least three-fold: in addition to the acknowledgment of the importance of political democracy by the universal Church, it, secondly, 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” (GS no. 73). And third, it establishes the crucial role of the Church as “the sign and safeguard of the transcendence of the human person” in such an order (GS no. 76).<sup>7</sup> I would suggest that politics, properly understood, is a key to other chapters on family, culture, economics, and peace, all of which depend in important ways upon the political wisdom and will of a given nation, and indeed the world community. For the universality of politics, the pervasive influence of political life, the increasing role of Catholics in the political life of the modern state, it turns out to have been a truly prophetic chapter, establishing the principles for the vital participation of Catholics in secular life in the modern world and the efforts for the new evangelization. What is quite remarkable is the fact

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<sup>6</sup> Oswald von Nell-Breuning considers *Gaudium et spes* to be a “lamentable retrograde step” compared to *Pacem in terris*; *ibid.*, p. 315.

<sup>7</sup> See Pope John Paul II., *Redemptor hominis* and *Centesimus annus*.

the original Schema left out the topic. Now that the attempts to achieve the goals in the other areas of special urgency have led to great setbacks, the time is right to better understand the political nature of secular life. Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, was not overly optimistic I would argue against Kraynak, Boeve, Rowland et al; rather, 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 has not failed us, we have failed the Council. As the Council itself warned, “This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age” (GS no. 43).<sup>8</sup> The Council, issuing no anathemas, finds the grave error on the side of Catholic witness, or its failure. Translated into the idiom of Pogo – “We have met the enemy and he is us.”

For my paper I would like to trace this theme of political participation and comment upon its important bearing upon our questions of globalization and nationalism. I shall divide my account into three major parts. First, I shall outline the teaching on political life in terms of the rationale and meaning for political participation, as presented in *Gaudium et spes* chapter four of section II; I shall pay special attention to the notion of the common good. Second, I shall present what I take to be the proper theological context for this teaching and explore the special conditions and challenges that face Catholics in their efforts to participate in political affairs; and third and finally I shall pursue a theoretical question concerning the status of the nation/state – is it the true locus of political life? Is the nation/state due to unravel from pressures from below (devolution) or above (internationalism)?

## II. The Rationale and Meaning of Political Participation

What is meant by political participation? The theme is anticipated in the previous 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, women. The lack of fundamental culture, literacy, is an impediment to cooperation in “promotion of the common good.” (GS no. 60) So culture is both an intrinsic good, as well as an instrumental one leading to

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<sup>8</sup> “This council exhorts Christians, as citizens of two cities, to strive to discharge their earthly duties conscientiously and in response to 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.”

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. (GS no. 65 – the largest possible number of people have an active share in directing development, GS no. 68 – the active sharing of all in the administration and profits of the enterprise in ways properly determined is to be promoted, GS no. 71 – private property is a condition for civil liberty).

So we are ready for the account in chapter four to unpack this notion. Participation includes first, 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 the 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 Plato and Aristotle’s *Politics* and culminating in the Thomistic tradition, e. g., transmission theory of political authority, brought to fruition by Bellarmine.

Why is political participation essential to political life in the modern world? There are three reasons for promoting participation which we must develop in more detail. The argument for political participation derives from three notions – from the dignity of the human person; from the importance of subsidiarity; and from the nature of the political good itself.

#### *Reason No. 1: The Dignity of the Human Person*

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 (see GS no. 22). And this awareness of human dignity finds an affinity with the historic awareness of human rights and the aspiration for liberty. The doctrine of human rights finds its true basis in human dignity. Thus, the council fathers outline a brief and sober list of basic rights – free assembly, association, expression of opinion, religious profession. But in an interesting turn the council fathers say – these rights are said to be “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.” [cives actuose participare in rei publicae vitae] (GS no. 73) In other words, these rights are understood to be more than a system for establishing a realm of privacy, but rather to participate in public life.

#### *Reason No. 2: The Importance of Subsidiarity*

A second reason for encouraging political participation and democratic forms of government cluster around the principle of subsidiarity. Yves R. Simon for-

mulates the principle of subsidiarity, which he calls “autonomy” as follows: “no task which can be satisfactorily fulfilled by the smaller unit should ever be assumed by the larger unit ... It is perfectly obvious that there is more life and unqualifiedly greater perfection in a community whose parts are full of initiative than in a community whose parts act merely as instruments transmitting the initiative as the whole.”<sup>9</sup> The account of political life in *Gaudium et spes*, first of all, condemns those political forms that shackle religious and civic liberty. And it also condemns those regimes which turn from the common good for the sake of private interests and factional purposes (GS no. 73). It condemns the restriction of rights and opposes the totalitarian government and dictatorship. It also cautions the civic body from giving too much power to the central government or in turn demanding too many benefits from the state. The role of intermediate groups must be encouraged: “Rulers must be careful not to hamper the development of family, social or cultural groups, nor that of intermediate bodies or organizations, and not to deprive them of opportunities for legitimate and constructive activity; they should willingly seek rather to promote the orderly pursuit of such activity.” (GS no. 75)

*Reason No. 3: The Nature of the Political Good Itself*

The most elaborate and intricate argument or reason for political participation and democratic forms of government stems from the nature of the political good itself. The political good is a common good. The common good is the law of politics: “The political community exists, consequently, for the sake of the common good, in which it finds its full justification and significance, and the source of its inherent legitimacy.” (GS no. 74)<sup>10</sup> The explication of the notion of the common good follows the classic approach set out by Aristotle in *Politics* Book I. The polis fulfills the social nature and inclination of man which first emerges in the family and expands to the level of the extended kinships of the village. But these pre-political associations are unable to complete or fulfill man at his highest and most noble potential. Political life contributes to the inner perfection or flowering of human sociability: “Men, families and the various groups which make up the civil community are aware that they cannot achieve a truly human life by their own unaided efforts. They see the need for a wider community, within which each one makes his specific contribution every day toward an ever broader realization of the common good.” (GS no. 74) It then defines the common good as follows: “the common good embraces

<sup>9</sup> Yves R. Simon, *Philosophy of Democratic Government* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), pp. 129–130.

<sup>10</sup> *Communitas ergo politica propter illud commune bonum existit, in quo suam plenam iustificationem et sensum obtinet, et ex quo ius suum primigenium et proprium depromit.*

the sum of those conditions of the social life whereby men, families and associations more adequately and readily may attain their own perfection." Now this definition could turn two ways – the political could itself be the perfection of their nature, or the political could facilitate the perfection of the pre-political groups. Of course it is both.

But a previous text provides a formula for the common good which is more instrumental in character: the common good is said to be "the sum of conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment" (GS no. 26). This definition may be construed in an instrumentalist fashion – i. e., that the political common good merely serves the ends of other pre-political "social" groups. The notion of the political good as an instrumental one is popular today – we talk about the government as a provider of goods and services, and that is what citizens seem to ask of their government and their political leaders. Oxford philosopher John Finnis states that the political community is a "community cooperating in the service of a common good which is instrumental, not itself basic." He sees political community as the "great facilitator" for other communities; the common good is defined as "the securing of a whole ensemble of material and other conditions, including forms of collaboration, that tend to favor, facilitate and foster the realization, by each individual in the community, of his or her personal development."<sup>11</sup> Finnis heavily emphasizes the principles of subsidiarity to point that the political community is purely instrumental – that is, its function is simply to assist other communities or forms of association in the flourishing of individuals. Participation in the political community itself, therefore, does not seem to be a form of flourishing, a perfection of human nature, as such.

But it may also be interpreted in another context; in a previous section (GS no. 12), we read – "For by his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential." In addition, the document states that the social ties of "family and political community relate with greater immediacy to his innermost nature" while other communities are more relative and conditioned by choice (GS no. 25).<sup>12</sup> Here we find the Aristotelian view that politics, and family, pertain to the core nature of human beings. Therefore, they constitute an essential form of flourishing. Further, as we noted above, rights are noted in particular as necessary con-

<sup>11</sup> See John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, p. 154. See also *Natural Law, Liberalism, and Morality*, ed. Robert P. George (Clarendon Press, 1996).

<sup>12</sup> See Heinrich A. Rommen, *The State in Catholic Thought* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1947). See chapter ten, *The State as a Perfect Society*, in which Rommen argues that the family and the state are the two communities necessary for the development of man's social nature. The family stands to the political community as the imperfect and incomplete to the more perfect and complete.



ditions for citizens to participate actively in the life and government of the state (GS no. 73). And the formulation of the common good as a perfection suggest an intrinsic good to politics. But they attain their full perfection by way of completion in political community, not just by way of facilitation.

There are obviously two aspects to the political good, according to *Gaudium et spes*. One aspect concerns the facilitation of the well functioning of other associations, and subsidiarity is a key to understanding the complexity of democratic regimes as structured in a mode of structural pluralism and federalism. The second aspect concerns participation of the citizen in the political order as a good in itself. The key question here is whether the political community is more than the sum of its parts – that is, whether the political community is a distinct association with its own proper good. The document contains two ideas – which I may describe as the public welfare view of political association on the one hand, and the republican view on the other. According to the public welfare view, the common good is no more than the sum of its parts and its role is simply to facilitate the good order and the conditions for the well functioning of the other associations. It could well involve active state intervention but for the sake of redistribution and the like. On the republican view of political association, the political community is a unique form of association; participation in it is an end or good in itself; this is because it allows for the exercise of man's highest faculties.<sup>13</sup> An adequate account of political life must relate both dimensions of the common good. Maritain has developed from the natural law tradition the idea of a "pluralist" structure in democratic society, by which he means a state must encourage the flourishing of multiple and plural groups and associations. But this does not detract from the substantive political good, but rather mediates it and supports it.<sup>14</sup> The Aristotelian view of the political association as an intrinsic good does not entail complete government control or interference with all other forms of association.

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<sup>13</sup> "The full actualization of humanity would then seem to consist, not in some sort of passive membership in civil society, but in the properly directed activity of the statesman, the legislator or the founder ... Politics is the field on which human excellence can show itself in its full growth and whose proper cultivation every form of excellence is in a way dependent." Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 133–134.

<sup>14</sup> See Maritain, "The Pluralist Principle in Democracy," in: *Range of Reason* (New York: Scribner's, 1952), pp. 165–171 (reprinted in *The Social and Political Thought of Jacques Maritain* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988)). See also Joseph W. Evans, *Jacques Maritain and the Problem of Pluralism in Political Life*, in: *Jacques Maritain, The Man and His Achievement*, ed. by Joseph W. Evans (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), pp. 215–236; for another account in the natural law tradition see also David T. Koyzis, "Yves R. Simon's Contribution to a Structural Political Pluralism," in *Freedom in the Modern World*, ed. by Michael D. Torre (Notre Dame: American Maritain Association, 1989), pp. 131–140.

The three reasons converge in the strong encouragement for political participation by Catholics, fully embracing their role as citizens. But as citizens they are encouraged 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 must need 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 "own responsibility" guided by "the dictates of a Christian conscience." And the confusion surrounding this term, or the unwillingness to abide it, has come to the point of special urgency and requiring an intervention by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. But one must also appreciate the development of the theology of the laity that provide the wider context for the Ratzinger intervention.

### III. Political Participation and Lay Apostolate

The life of the citizen as such pertains to the task assigned to the lay people. This is a great achievement of the council. 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 democratic politics 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 Christian, who is a member of both societies. But it would not come without effort and spiritual growth. Vatican II is known for its lack of anathemas and condemnations, taking a new approach to modernity no longer in terms of a syllabus of errors or condemnation of mistakes, but "to carry forward the work of Christ under the lead of the befriending Spirit." (GS no. 3) And thus one of the few errors condemned is that on the part of Christians who divorce their own earthly affairs from their religious life: "This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age." (GS no. 43) 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." 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. Indeed "secularity" is the very mark of the layman – "secular duties and activities belong properly to laymen" and they should work according 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. 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.”<sup>15</sup>

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. For good reason then did Paul VI remark in his message to rulers that the freedom of the Church will first of all benefit “your peoples” since the Church “forms for you loyal citizens, friends of social peace and progress.”

Why has the grand vision and promise been so slow to be realized? What called forth the Ratzinger intervention and how are we to understand it? The obvious reason is that Catholics have failed to understand or to implement the role of conscience in political life. The deeper reason I would trace to the failure to understand the real revolution of Vatican II concerning the universal call to holiness and the precise nature of lay participation in the priestly, kingly, and prophetic offices of our Lord Jesus Christ. Again this revolution, this development, is the fruition of many decades of spiritual fermentation and theological developments. It should be no surprise that its penetration of the vast Catholic laity will take the time of yeast in the dough or the seed in the field. But the enemy has sown the cockle in the field. Catholic citizens and politicians have become assimilated to and absorbed by the dominant liberal ideology. Thus, I do understand the good reasons for the sharp critique of a Kraynak or a Row-

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<sup>15</sup> “Lumen gentium,” in Austin Flannery, ed. *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Postconciliar Documents*, vol. 1 (Northport, New York: Costello, 1998), no. 36; on the positive meaning of “secularity” for the laity see Pope John Paul II, *The Lay Members of Christ’s Faithful People* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1988) sections 9, 15, 17.

land. But that critique should be aimed at the Catholic laity, and the failures of leadership in the episcopacy, not the council as such. The Doctrinal note lays it all out very succinctly. Here we find the full context for lay participation in politics, a restatement of the essential principles derived from *Gaudium et spes*, and a refutation of the chief errors that render so many efforts of Catholic laity in politics truly fruitless.

I shall provide but a brief summary of the document highlighting some themes we have uncovered in *Gaudium et spes*. The confusion stems from the false understanding of autonomy already identified in *Gaudium et spes* no. 36. The separation of Church and state does not entail the separation of morality and state. Indeed, the very foundation of the modern state and its legitimacy to protect the rights of the person rest upon morality. Relativism is a dangerous way to explain toleration and respect for the dignity of the person. Further, the document points out 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. Ratzinger acknowledges 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. I believe that this is the deeper reason for Catholic failure in politics today. It is the failure to understand the fundamental challenge of Vatican II and the unity of 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 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’” (Christifideles Laici no. 59).

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 faith. Invoking Thomas More at the outset of the document, Ratzinger clearly means to convey the notion that unity of life and witness to faith are the primary values at stake in political action.

Nevertheless, the practical measure for political integrity and the measure of success laid out by Ratzinger in this document should be all too obvious. “A well formed Christian conscience does not permit one to vote for a political program or law which contradicts the fundamental content of faith or morals.” Especially with respect to moral principles with no exception, the Catholic commitment is clear. It is more evident, he says, and laden with responsibility. A Catholic must resist the legalization and rationalizations surrounding the culture of death. As for the concrete and positive policies for promoting life from conception to natural death and involving the plurality of goods of human flourishing, the field is wide open for prudential and creative work. As was said in *Ecclesia in America*, “What is expected from the laity is a great creative effort in activities and works demonstrating a life in harmony with the Gospel” (no. 44).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> There are two areas in which lay people live their vocation. The first, and the one best suited to their lay state, is the secular world, which they are called to shape according to God’s will. “Their specific activity brings the Gospel to the structures of the world; ‘working in holiness wherever they are, they consecrate the world itself to God’”. 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. On a continent marked by competition and aggressiveness, unbridled consumerism and corruption, lay people are called to embody deeply evangelical values such as mercy, forgiveness, honesty, transparency of heart and patience in difficult situations. What is expected from the laity is a great creative effort in activities and works demonstrating a life in harmony with the Gospel”. America needs lay Christians able to assume roles of leadership in society. It is urgent to train men and women who, in keeping with their vocation, can influence public life, and direct it to the common good. In political life, understood in its truest and noblest sense as the administration of the common good, they can find the path of their own sanctification. For this, they must be formed in the truths and values of the Church’s social teaching, and in the basic notions of a theology of the laity. A deeper knowledge of Christian ethical principles and moral values will enable them to be exponents of these in their own particular setting, proclaiming them even where appeals are made to the so-called “neutrality of the State”.

#### IV. Political Participation, the Common Good, and the Nation/State – Is the Nation/State the Political Community par Excellent?

The keenest reason for affirming the instrumentalist account of the common good maybe that the notion of political society as a self-sufficient or perfect society is outdated in the modern world. For example, John Finnis well understands that Aristotle sees political life as constituted by more than a mutual insurance arrangement; he cites exactly the right passages from Aristotle's *Politics*. But he does not believe that a political association can attain true self-sufficiency and complete fulfillment; only a supernatural divine gift can afford one this option. Therefore, as he says in *Natural Law*, one must reject as a "legal fiction" the notion that the nation state is a "complete community."<sup>17</sup> He also says that the self-sufficient life or complete community is "utterly" beyond the reach of political society. Finnis says that Aristotle prematurely and falsely generalized that the *polis* achieved a complete community. He was anticipating the Church and the heavenly kingdom.

The notion of self-sufficiency is a very subtle and challenging issue in Aristotle's account of the political community. It is a notion that includes material conditions for maintaining existence – such as food, tools, arms, property – as well as provision of essential services such as a system of justice and public worship. It requires a large and diversified population. But it is the aim or *telos* of the political community which constitutes its self-sufficiency or perfection. The sub-political groupings are incomplete because they cannot bring to completion to the education and formation of human potential. The political community provides a more complete and perfect scope of human action. Now Aristotle himself realized that some human potential even transcends political life. Contemplation, for example, develops its own peculiar self-sufficiency and perfection beyond the *polis*. The claim that completion or perfection is "utterly beyond" the reach of the political community is simply false. There is some degree of perfection possible in political community; it is a perfection that in some way completes or perfects family and other associations. Thus, it is not some premature generalization merely pointing to some ecumenic or cosmopolitan association or heavenly vision. Finnis's ideal community of choosers is no more helpful than an original position or state of nature. To set up an ideal and then reject concrete historical reality because it does not perfectly instantiate the ideal is a very peculiar, non-Aristotelian and non-empirical way of arguing. Why be forced to an all or nothing proposition? The political good is an achievement that is concrete and historical.

Aristotle was correct about a historical temporal community: the *polis* does represent the highest possibility in the realm of human temporal achievement.

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<sup>17</sup> John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, p. 150.

Political reality does indeed constitute a form of friendship and intrinsically good form of association. High hopes and aspirations are fulfilled by a decent political regime. A trans-political good, a heavenly community, or whatever, does not detract from the completion or perfection of human nature within the order of nature.

Finnis also argues that international interdependence undermines the nation's claim to being a complete or intrinsically good form of association, even within the temporal order. International interdependence may well call for adjustments to the material conditions of "self-sufficiency." But as for the end or purpose of political community, I am not convinced that an international association could in any shape or form constitute a political regime. International order surely is best served by a form of federation and not a "world state." Again, it was Tocqueville who wisely observed that "the interests of the human race are better served by giving every man a particular fatherland than by trying to inflame his passion for the whole of humanity."<sup>18</sup> The nation can make some claim to the loyalty of its citizens because it is an intrinsic and high good and it fulfills a high human potential. At the present, there is no other form or association that replaces it.<sup>19</sup>

The modern "nation state" is not the same entity as a *polis*. But some features have been preserved; it is not simply a legal fiction, as Finnis maintains.<sup>20</sup> The elements of self-sufficiency mentioned by Aristotle are preserved in various ways. And the end or purpose of political rule and political virtue are retained in the nation-state. Education of citizens, political and civic virtues, civic religion, and justice contribute to a unique and elevated perfection of human nature. As Tocqueville observed, the political freedom is best mediated through local and state politics. True federalism attempts to incorporate the intrinsic good of political association on its various levels. The loss of true federalism is a sad state of affairs, and this may indeed obscure the nature of the political good. National administrative offices serving prior choices of individuals grow in power and influence. But this contingent fact should not lead us to take it as normative and thereby declare that the political good is merely instrumental. We should earnestly hope for the recovery of true political association as Aristotle first envisioned it and subsequent republican thinkers have described it.

The political association must be concerned with educating its citizens to participate in the regime; it must insure that good citizens are formed to share a common view of justice and to devote themselves to the political good. Aristotle says that political concord is a form of friendship and a good and political

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<sup>18</sup> Roger Boesche, *The Strange Liberalism of Alexis de Tocqueville* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 215.

<sup>19</sup> See Leo Strauss, *Natural Right*, 130–132.

<sup>20</sup> *Natural Law*, p. 150.

discord, faction, a evil. The harmony or concord of citizens is constituted by common opinions about justice and a common willingness to pursue such a notion of justice. The question of making citizens good surely emerges first on this level; the citizens must be educated into the principles and customs of the political association. This is not a matter of coercion, but of education. Civic religion often has a determinative influence here. Whether one likes it or not, the state does share to some degree in presenting to the citizens matters of fundamental import and in some way orients them to the “ultimate source of all reality, including meaning and value” (Finnis definition of the good of religion). Citizens desire to know and to affirm the justice of their laws, the meaning and destiny of its life, hardships, wars, and struggles. All this is cast against the backdrop of some understanding of ultimate purposes: an examination of great statesmen bears profound testimony to this fact.<sup>21</sup> To deny the role of divine order, or to exalt human freedom and creativity in some existentialist fashion as was recently done in the Casey decision, is de facto to take an orientation to “first things” and to encourage the citizens to take the bearings accordingly.<sup>22</sup> The Catholic citizen can help the nation maintain its balance in this quest for a politics of meaning.

Why encourage active participation in political affairs? The notion of “generous patriotism” called for by *Gaudium et spes* could not be derived from a purely instrumental view of the political good. Who would die for an instrument? Men and women take risks and sacrifice for a beloved object, an intrinsic good. Rawlsian liberalism and its variations continue to falter on the issue of self-sacrifice and patriotic duty. As George Grant so well put it: “Why should anyone choose to be a soldier or a policeman, if Lockean contractualism is the truth about justice?”<sup>23</sup> The customs, practices and rituals of political societies confirm the fact that the regime is an object of loyalty and love because it is a good and noble object. Just consider the ceremonies and celebrations which affirm the good of the nation or city or state; National anthems and flags and pledges; national and state holidays, inaugurations and coronations; conventions, caucuses, elections; debates, speeches, and commentators; the burial and commemoration of the war dead. All of these things reveal the nature of political community as an intrinsic good, indeed a superior or higher good.

Philosophers have captured this phenomenon of allegiance to the political community under the idea of friendship; political life has the potential to be a high form of friendship. The tradition of civic-republicanism views political life

<sup>21</sup> See Glen Thurow, *Abraham Lincoln and American Political Religion* (Albany: SUNY, 1967).

<sup>22</sup> See Russ Hittinger, “Et Tu, Justice Kennedy?” *Crisis* Vol. 10, no. 8 (September 1992): 16–22; see also George Grant, *English Speaking Justice*, on the de facto ontology of *Roe v. Wade* (see pages 69–89).

<sup>23</sup> George Parkin Grant, *English Speaking Justice* (Notre Dame Press), pp. 61–62.



as an intrinsic good because it is akin to friendship. Aristotle, it is well known, states that “friendship holds states together and lawgivers apparently devote more attention to it than to justice” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1155a22ff). Friendship is higher than justice and is considered the very form or soul of political community.<sup>24</sup> Thus, Jacques Maritain says that:

“Justice is a primary condition for the existence of the body politic, but Friendship is its very life-giving form. It tends toward a really human and freely achieved communion. It lives on the devotion of the human person and their gift of themselves. They are ready to commit their own existence, their possessions and their honor for its sake. The civic sense is made up of this sense of devotion and mutual love as well as the sense of justice and law.”<sup>25</sup>

Thus, Maritain says further that the common good of the political society is a superior unity which includes the family and other particular societies, being constituted by a plurality of associations. But political society is a distinct and superior society; its common good includes “public welfare and general order of law” but also something “far larger and richer”: the “sociological integration of all the civic conscience, political virtues and sense of law and freedom, of all the activity, material prosperity and spiritual riches, of moral rectitude, justice and friendship, happiness, virtue and heroism in the individual lives of its members of the body politic ... [thereby] reverting to each member, helping him to perfect his life and liberty as a person.”<sup>26</sup> Similarly Tocqueville used friendship as a model for understanding political life. As a recent author has stated, “Friendship offered Tocqueville a model for free, political action in cooperation with others. He extended this model to argue that only in interaction with others, especially but not exclusively in political interaction, can we recognize our own potential, augment and diversify our personal talents, and discover new ideas.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, for Tocqueville, “the idea of friends acting in common, rather than that of individuals constitutionally secured against interference in their private affairs, lies at the heart of a free society.”<sup>28</sup> Friendship intensifies and amplifies action. Tocqueville observed: “Feelings and ideas are renewed, the heart enlarged, and the understanding developed only by the reciprocal action of men one upon another.”<sup>29</sup> Tocqueville had in mind association emerging on very local levels and extending upward; perhaps such friendship or association thins out with its extent. This very fact illustrates the importance of the smaller com-

<sup>24</sup> See Gerard Phelan, “Justice and Friendship,” *The Thomist* 5 (1943): 153–170; reprinted in G. B. Phelan Selected Papers (Toronto: PIMS, 1967).

<sup>25</sup> *Man and the State* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 10.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* p. 12.

<sup>27</sup> Roger Boesche, *op. cit.*, pp. 152–155.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. by J. P. Mayer, translation by George Lawrence (Garden City: Doubleday, 1969), p. 515.

munity, such as a *polis*. State and national association are also quite capable of evoking intense and loyal friendship as a basis for political action.

### Summary

This paper examines the section of *Gaudium et spes* on politics in the modern world. I explain why politics is the key to the implementation of the Church's involvement on behalf of the family, economics, and international relations. The rationale and meaning of political participation is explained in terms of the dignity of the human person and the importance of subsidiarity in the growth of the modern state. The full and proper understanding of political participation requires seeing politics in the theological context provided by the new emphasis upon lay apostolate and the sanctification of the world. Finally, the paper briefly outlines some areas in which political participation pertains to globalization.

### Zusammenfassung

Der Beitrag befaßt sich mit den Aussagen von *Gaudium et spes* zu politischen Fragen in der modernen Welt. Politik ist der Schlüssel zum Verständnis, wenn sich die Kirche für die Familie, die Wirtschaft und die internationalen Beziehungen einsetzt. Die Bedeutung der politischen Teilhabe wird entfaltet in den Begriffen der Würde der menschlichen Person und der Bedeutung der Subsidiarität beim Aufbau des modernen Staates. Das volle und richtige Verständnis der politischen Teilhabe ist nur möglich, wenn Politik im theologischen Kontext gesehen wird, und zwar im Hinblick auf die neue Betonung, die auf dem Laienapostolat und der Heiligung der Welt liegt. Schließlich werden kurz einige Bereiche behandelt, bei denen die politische Teilhabe zur Globalisierung gehört.