



PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM  
DE IUSTITIA ET PACE

XXVII Plenary Assembly, Opening Remarks  
***THE CHURCH'S RESPONSIBILITY TO SOCIETY:  
THE MANDATE OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL  
FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE TODAY***

San Calisto, 5 December 2012

Your Eminences, my Lord Archbishops and Bishops, Very Reverend Fathers, Reverend Sisters of the Consecrated Life, Illustrious and Distinguished Professors, my Brothers and Sisters: I wish to greet you all heartily this morning, and bid you warmly welcome to the 27th Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. We thank God for your safe travel to this Plenary Assembly.

At the beginning of this Plenary Assembly, we wish to recognize the changes that the list of the Members and Consultors of the Dicastery has gone through. The Holy See has recognized some who have generously served and helped advance the ministry of this Dicastery for years, and has fittingly expressed her gratitude to them. Although they are not asked to join the Council in Plenary Assemblies, they serve nevertheless as friends of the Dicastery who continue to contribute its work.

The Holy See appreciates and greatly esteems the willingness of existing Members and Consultors to continue to serve on this Pontifical Council. In addition, she also joyfully and gratefully welcomes the New Members and Consultors who have generously accepted to serve on this Council, and are attending the Council's Plenary Assembly for the first time. They will soon introduce themselves.

In these three days, we shall get to know each other better and discover how to work together. In this sense, we shall also endeavour to reflect on the mandate

of this Pontifical Council in its changed and changing contexts, which we are used to referring to as "*res novae*" of the human family -- among them, the increasing tendency of excluding religion from the public sphere of life.

Indeed, the definition of the relationship between the Church and Society / State which the Popes, from Pope Leo XIII on passionately taught, is *a distinction between Church and State, but without either being extraneous -- much less opposed -- to the other*. The State is oriented to this world and this life, but to this the faith ought not to remain extraneous. Neither is the Church directed towards a purely other-worldly salvation, which neither enlightens nor directs existence on earth. This was, for Pope Leo XIII, "the fatal principle of separation of Church and State".<sup>1</sup>

It was the Vatican Council II, whose 50th anniversary we celebrate this year, and which engendered our Pontifical Council, that charged Christian communities to *analyze the signs of the times*, and, to enter into dialogue with the whole human family, to which she belongs, about all its different problems.<sup>2</sup> Through their discernment about their social order, Christian communities are invited to exercise a prophetic voice in their society. This much is about the Church and Society / State as the sphere of our Council's activity; and we can describe some more!

But Vatican II, in its approach and with its ecclesiology of *communion* and *mission*, would also make of our Plenary Assembly an instance of *ecclesial communion* for **mission**. In this Assembly, we shall have the occasion (regional groups' discussion and reports) to present and to share the challenges and opportunities for the realization of the mission of the Church and of the Pontifical Council in our various countries and situations.

It is expected, too, that the celebration of the *Year of Faith* and the *Synod on New evangelization for the Transmission of the Faith* will also affect our Plenary Assembly. Already at the Synod, this Pontifical Council requested the inclusion of

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<sup>1</sup> Encyclical letter: *Libertas*, §38 (20 June 1888): "*La funesta opinione che la Chiesa deve essere separata dallo Stato.*"

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Gaudium et Spes* §3. The "new things" can find in the Gospel the context for their correct understanding and the proper moral perspective for judgment on them, cf. *Centesimus annus*, §5.

the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* among the fundamental texts of our faith on the web site of the Holy See. This has been done. The other suggestion made was to refer to the observation of Blessed Pope John Paul II that: "The 'new evangelization', which the modern world urgently needs and which I have emphasized many times, must include among its essential elements a proclamation of the Church's social doctrine,"<sup>3</sup> and to urge that the *new evangelization* and its application of the *Social Doctrine of the Church* entail an *evangelization of the social order*. Our Plenary Assembly will dedicate some time to the discussion of this theme; but as it is clear from its character, this discussion will be a moment for our Council to listen more to you and to the accounts of your experiences from the different geographical areas.

In a very particular way and on account of the current economic crisis, we hope that this Plenary Assembly will help the Council deepen its reflection on Benedict XVI's call for the development of *a public authority of a global competence* as an implementation of the principle to protect etc. (Civ §67).

In a similar vein and as a result of other studies and seminars, organized by the Council on the encyclical of Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, another sampling of views from the world of business and finance is going on through the publication of *Vocation of the Business Leader*. This will be presented in greater detail in the report on the activities of the Dicastery soon.

For now, then, let me thank you all again for your presence. We look forward to a lively and a successful meeting, and so do commend this Plenary Assembly to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Thank you all for your kind attention.

Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson  
President

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<sup>3</sup> *Centesimus annus* §5.