

**Time for Reflection**  
**Scottish Parliament**  
**Wednesday 12 March 2008**  
**Address delivered by**  
**His Excellency Archbishop Faustino Sainz Muñoz**  
**Apostolic Nuncio**

I am truly grateful for the kind invitation extended to me by the Scottish Parliament to lead the time of reflection today.

I am quite aware of the parameters of this talk, which were clearly indicated by the instructions given about this short reflection. For me, as diplomat and archbishop, the task is particularly challenging since I am aware that as a diplomat I must refrain from any interference in the internal affairs of a country, and as Archbishop to avoid any remarks that may seem to take sides in a political debate.

So, what I thought I would do is simply to state, as matter of information, how the Catholic Church regards political life.

The Catholic Church places political activity in high regard and views those who engage in politics with much esteem. It does so because it believes that political activity “exists for the common good: this is its full justification and meaning and the source of its specific and basic right to exist” (from Vatican Council Document on “The Church in the Modern World”). In other words, the very *raison d’être* of politics is to promote what is good for individuals and communities as a whole.

In fact, the Church understands the common good as that which “embraces the sum total of all those conditions of social life which enable individuals, families, and organisations to achieve complete and efficacious fulfilment”.

Therefore, I would say without any hesitation that a noble task has been entrusted to you by your fellow citizens – a task which has as its goal, the total and complete good of your fellow citizens and your country. This understanding of political life has been enshrined in the teaching of the Church since the Second Vatican Council and has directed the Church’s relation with political activity ever since.

Pope John Paul II elaborated on this approach to political life on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 2000 in the Jubilee for members of Parliament and politicians. He stated that since political activity is for the common good, “it ought to be carried out in a spirit of service”, and “Christians who engage in politics – and who wish to do so as Christians – must act selflessly, not seeking their own advantages, or that of their group or party, but the good of one and all, and consequently in the first place, that of the less fortunate members of society.”

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Therefore, because politics, in the vision of the Church, deals with the good of people, individually and collectively, the primary subject of the political system is the human person. As a result, there are matters and issues that arise which the Church considers fundamentally related to the dignity of the human person.

These matters are life, the family, education, religious belief, justice and protection for those most in need in society. The Church's approach to such issues is based above all in the very nature of the human person as created in the image and likeness of God.

Consequently, you can certainly understand why the Church takes such an interest in these questions. It does so, not in an attempt to impose its views or doctrines on society, and even less on any legislative body, but rather it does so in a spirit of service to the common good and the nature of the human person, realities which transcend institutions, but which must rely on the good intentions of institutions to be protected and safeguarded. In that context it is even foreseen that at times the Church can offer its own expertise on these universal questions in collaboration with public authorities while always respecting the distinct competencies that each has.

Obviously, I am very much aware of the challenges facing you as lawmakers, in a pluralistic society, which has so many voices and different points of view about a whole range of issues. Yet, a convergence can be found in keeping in mind those principles whose goal you have as legislators in a spirit of service to your country: to promote the common good and to respect the nature and dignity of the human person.

Once again, thank you for this unique opportunity to stand before you, members of this august assembly who have a truly noble task of serving your fellow citizens in order to assist them in attaining their highest aspirations.