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Video Message of the Holy Father to participants in the International Conference "A Politics Rooted in the People"

The following is the text of the video message sent by the Holy Father Francis to the participants in the International Conference "A Politics Rooted in the People", organised by the Centre for Theology and Community", at the beginning of the works:

Video Message of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I'm happy to send you some words of greeting at the start of this conference organised by the Centre for Theology and Community in London around the themes in the book *Let Us Dream*, above all as they relate to the people's movements and the organisations that support them.

I send a special greeting to the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, which celebrates its 50th year helping the poorest communities in the United States to live with greater dignity, promoting their participation in the decisions that affect them.

This is also the sphere of work of many other organisations here present, from the UK, Germany and elsewhere, whose mission is to walk with the people in their search for work, wages, and housing, -- the famous "three Ts" [1] -- and staying by their side when they meet with attitudes of opposition and contempt. The poverty and exclusion from the labor market that have followed this pandemic have made your work and witness all the more urgent and necessary.

One objective of your meeting is to show that the true response to the rise of populism is precisely not more individualism but quite the opposite: a politics of fraternity, rooted in the life of the people. In his recent book, Reverend Angus Ritchie calls this politics that you do "inclusive populism"; I like to use the term "popularism" to express the same idea.[2] But what matters is not the name but the vision, which is the same: it is about finding

the means to guarantee a life for all people that is worthy of being called human, a life capable of cultivating virtue and forging new bonds.[3]

In *Let Us Dream* I call this a “politics with a capital P”, politics as service, which opens new pathways for the people to organise and express itself. It is a politics not just *for* the people, but *with* the people, rooted in their communities and in their values. On the other hand, populisms tend to be inspired, consciously or not, by another slogan: “everything for the people, nothing with the people” – political paternalism. So in this populist vision the people is not protagonist of its own destiny, but ends up in thrall to an ideology.

When people are cast aside, they are denied not just material wellbeing but the dignity of acting, of being a protagonist of their own destiny and history, of expressing themselves with their values and culture, their creativity and fruitfulness. That is why it is impossible for the Church to separate the promotion of social justice from the recognition of the culture and values of the people, which include the spiritual values that are the source of their sense of dignity. In Christian communities, those values are born from the encounter with Jesus Christ, who tirelessly seeks out the lost and downhearted, those struggling to live from day to day, to bring them the face and presence of God, to be “God with us”.

Many of you gathered here have worked for many years to do this in the peripheries, walking with the people’s movements. It can be uncomfortable at times. Some accuse you of being too political, others of trying to impose religion. But you understand that respect for the people means respect also for their institutions, including their religious ones; and that the role of those institutions is not to impose anything but to walk with the people, reminding them of the face of God who always goes before us.

That is why the true shepherd of a people, a religious shepherd, is one who seeks to walk in front, among, and behind the people: in front, to point out to them something of the way ahead; among them, to feel with the people and not to go wrong; and behind, to assist the stragglers and to allow the people, with its own nose for these things, also finds for itself the right paths.

That is why in *Let Us Dream* I speak of a desire: that every diocese in the world have an ongoing collaboration with the people’s movements.[4]

Going out to meet the risen, wounded Christ in our poorest communities allows us to recover our missionary vigour, for it is here that the Church was born, in the margins of the Cross. “If the Church disowns the poor, she ceases to be the Church of Jesus; she falls back on the old temptation to become a moral or intellectual elite” -- a new form of Pelagianism, or a kind of Essene life.[5]

In the same way, a politics that turns its back on the poor will never be able to promote the common good. A politics that turns its back on the peripheries will never be able to understand the center, and will confuse the future with a self-projection, as if in a mirror.

One of the ways of turning one’s back on the poor is by having contempt for the cultural, spiritual, and religious values of the people, which are either ignored or exploited for reasons of power. The contempt for the culture of the people is the beginning of the abuse of power.

In recognising the importance of spirituality in the lives of the people, we regenerate politics. That is why it is essential that faith communities meet together and fraternise in order to work “for and with the people.” With my brother the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, “[we] declare the adoption of a culture of dialogue as the path; mutual cooperation as the code of conduct; reciprocal understanding as the method and standard”.[6] Always in the service of the peoples.

Now, more than ever, dear friends, we must build a future from below, from a politics with the people, rooted in the people. May your conference help to light up the way. Thank you very much.

[1] In Spanish: *tierra, techo y trabajo*

[2] Angus Ritchie, *Inclusive Populism: Creating Citizens in the Global Age* (Univ. Notre Dame Press, 2019)

[3] Pope Francis, *Let Us Dream. The Path to a Better Future. In conversation with Austen Ivereigh* (Simon & Schuster, 2020) p. 112

[4] *Let Us Dream*, p. 121.

[5] *Let Us Dream*, p. 120.

[6] *Document on Human Fraternity*, quoted in *Fratelli tutti*, no. 285.
