Message of His Holiness Pope Leo XIV to Participants in the Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences

I was pleased to learn of the plenary session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences taking place from 14 to 16 April 2026, and I send prayerful good wishes to all taking part. I express my gratitude to Cardinal Peter Turkson for his dedicated service as Chancellor of the Academy. I likewise thank your President, Sister Helen Alford, for selecting the theme: "The Uses of Power: Legitimacy, Democracy and the Rewriting of the International Order." It is a particularly timely topic, focusing your reflection on the exercise of power, which is a critical element for building peace within and among nations at this moment of profound global change.

Catholic social teaching regards power not as an end in itself, but as a means ordered toward the common good. This implies that the legitimacy of authority depends not on the accumulation of economic or technological strength, but on the wisdom and virtue with which it is exercised for the common good (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1903*). For wisdom enables us to discern and pursue the true and the good, rather than apparent goods and vainglory, amid the circumstances of daily life. This wisdom is inseparable from the moral virtues, which strengthen our desire to promote the common good. In particular, we know that justice and fortitude are indispensable for sound decision-making and for putting decisions into practice. Temperance also proves essential for the legitimate use of authority, for a true understanding of temperance restrains inordinate self-exaltation and acts as a guardrail against the abuse of power.

This understanding of legitimate power finds one of its highest expressions in authentic democracy. Far from being a mere procedure, this type of democracy recognizes the dignity of every person and calls each citizen to participate responsibly in the pursuit of the common good. Reflecting this conviction, Saint John Paul II affirmed that the Church values democracy because it ensures participation in political choices and "the possibility both of electing and holding accountable those who govern them, and of replacing them through peaceful means when appropriate" (*Centesimus Annus*, 46). Democracy remains healthy, however, only when rooted in the moral law and a true vision of the human person. Lacking this foundation, it risks becoming either a majoritarian tyranny or a mask for the dominance of economic and technological elites.

The same principles that guide the exercise of authority within nations must likewise inform the international order — a truth that is particularly important to recall at a time when strategic rivalries

and shifting alliances are reshaping global relations. We must recall that a just and stable international order cannot emerge from the mere balance of power or from a purely technocratic logic. The concentration of technological, economic and military power in a few hands threatens both democratic participation among peoples and international concord.

In this regard, my predecessors have expressed the need for updated institutions and a universal authority (cf. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 58; John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 137), marked by the principle of subsidiarity (cf. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 57). The development of such a global community of fraternity calls for "a better kind of politics, one truly at the service of the common good" (Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 154). Indeed, it is "more necessary than ever to boldly rethink the modalities of international cooperation" (*Visit to the FAO Headquarters on the Occasion of World Food Day*, 16 October 2025, 7).

In the final analysis, when earthly powers threaten the *tranquillitas ordinis* — the classic Augustinian definition of peace — we must draw hope from the Kingdom of God, which, though not of this world, sheds light upon the affairs of this world and reveals their eschatological meaning. In this perspective of faith, we are reminded that God's omnipotence is shown especially in mercy and forgiveness (cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 25, a. 3, ad 3); divine power does not dominate, but rather heals and restores. It is precisely this logic of charity that must animate history, for human activity inspired by charity helps to shape the "earthly city" in unity and peace, rendering it — however imperfectly — an anticipation and a prefiguration of the "City of God" (cf. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 7). Such faith strengthens our resolve to build a culture of reconciliation capable of overcoming the pitfalls of indifference and powerlessness (cf. *Address in the Presence of Religious Leaders*, 28 October 2025).

With these sentiments, I earnestly hope that your reflections during these days will yield valuable insights for clarifying the legitimate uses of power, the criteria of authentic democracy and the kind of international order that serves the common good. In this way, your work will contribute meaningfully to the building of a global culture of reconciliation and peace — a peace that is not merely the fragile absence of conflict, but the fruit of justice, born of authority placed humbly at the service of every human being and the entire human family.

May the Holy Spirit, source of all charity and bond of unity and peace, enlighten your minds and sustain your efforts. I willingly invoke upon all of you God's abundant blessings.

From the Vatican, 9 April 2026

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