

CONCLUDING ADDRESS

The Call to Justice: The Legacy of *Gaudium et spes* Forty Years Later

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1. Dear Friends, we have arrived at the final moments of our meeting, organized to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of the Second Vatican Council. This meeting has enriched all of us with the contributions that have been offered, with the discussions that have taken place in the numerous seminar activities, with the experience of friendship and sharing, human and spiritual, that we have had and by means of which each of us has had the grace of experiencing the presence of others as a precious gift awaiting us. We have felt above all what it means to be children of the Church, our Mother and Teacher, who continues tirelessly to show us the demanding path of evangelization and human promotion. For all of this, we wish to express our gratitude to the Lord Jesus, who has accompanied us with the regenerating counsel of the Holy Spirit.

This concluding address will be only a salute, for it is impossible to sum up in few words the extraordinary wealth of content of our meeting. Let me however express to all of you who have participated -- to the Cardinals who have presided over our assemblies, to the presenters, to those who have contributed to the work in groups, to the organizers -- my most sincere and heartfelt thanks. A special thank-you goes to Dr. Samuel Kobia for his ecumenical message in the name of the World Council of Churches.

After this brief pause in the Vatican, you will take up once more the paths of your daily routines and work within the University Institutes that you have represented so well. I wish to express to these Institutes my sentiments of deep gratitude and of profound and sincere esteem: may the Lord continue to fill your lives and your work as scholars and experts with *Christian joy and hope*.

Your generous willingness to cooperate with the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace has helped to develop mutual knowledge and, above all, to bring into finer focus the opportunity to make optimal use -- at the methodological level -- of the *interdisciplinary dimension of the Church's social doctrine*. This method has shown itself to be filled with positive and very useful implications. It can and must be used in the future, in various contexts also and with different models of organization.

2. It seems to me that our Conference on *Gaudium et Spes* has in fact developed on two levels. The first has seen the *confirmation of the validity of the principal and typical paradigms of the conciliar Constitution*, above all, those of the inseparable connection between Christology and anthropology and of the Church's self-awareness as essentially open, in her missionary service of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus, to the joys and hopes but also to the sorrows and anxieties of men and women, in particular of the poor and those who are

excluded. The second level has had to do with the effort to *update* -- to use a term in vogue at the time of the Council --, to bring into focus the *res novae* that characterize our present moment in history, in order to discern within these new things those *signs of the times* that seek profound responses from our Christian conscience. In these forty years that separate us from the promulgation of the conciliar Constitution, the historical and cultural scenarios, the socio-economic and socio-political contexts have changed, becoming more complex and multi-faceted. But the reference to the eccesiological and anthropological premises of *Gaudium et Spes* allows us to face, with the instruments of *fides* and of *ratio*, the changes and the challenges of our time. All of this is very relevant in view of a correct understanding and an adequate utilization of the Church's social doctrine. In this regard, the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* states: "*The Church's social doctrine is presented as a 'work site' where the work is always in progress, where perennial truth penetrates and permeates new circumstances, indicating paths of justice and peace.* Faith does not presume to confine changeable social and political realities within a closed framework¹. Rather, the contrary is true: faith is the leaven of innovation and creativity. The teaching that constantly takes this as its starting point 'develops through reflection applied to the changing situations of this world, under the driving force of the Gospel as the source of renewal'²" (No. 86).

Dear Friends, as Mother and Teacher the Church seeks neither to close herself off nor to retreat within herself, but wishes always to reach out and be turned towards man, in whose destiny of salvation she finds her reason for being. She is in the midst of men and women as the living icon of the Good Shepherd, who goes in search of and finds man where he is, in the existential and historical circumstances of his life. It is here that the Church becomes a point of contact with the Gospel, with the message of liberation and reconciliation, of justice and peace. It is in this perspective that the perennial relevance of *Gaudium et Spes* is found.

3. The Holy Father John Paul II sent us a very beautiful and demanding Message. We thank him with all our heart, and we pray for him, tried as he is by suffering, and we assure him of our filial and devout acceptance of the invaluable indications contained in his Message. I recall a few of those indications here because of the value and importance that they have for *updating* our agenda concerning the *res novae*:

- a) *To take in hand anew and decisively the fundamental questions concerning justice.* The Holy Father writes: "*The call to justice* draws attention to the challenge that the Church constantly faces, committed as she is to reminding every believer of the need to interpret social realities in the light of the Gospel (cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 62). Sometimes, the great advances in science and technology can actually lead to a forgetfulness of the fundamental issues of justice, despite the common aspiration to greater solidarity between peoples and a more human structuring of social relations";
- b) *The inseparable relation between justice and peace.* The Holy Father writes: "The sad continuation of armed conflicts and the recurring manifestations of violence in so many parts of the world serve to show the necessity for the inseparable relationship between justice and peace, in accordance with the fundamental teaching proposed with courageous clarity in *Gaudium et Spes* (cf. No. 78). In this regard, I would like once again to reaffirm that peace is the work of justice: indeed, it is born from that order on which the Divine Founder himself wanted to build human society";
- c) *The Christian perspective of love and charity.* The Pope writes: "To say it in other

words: the theme of justice does not exhaust the social doctrine of the Church. The virtue of love that leads to forgiveness and reconciliation and motivates Christian commitment to justice must never be forgotten. It nevertheless remains unquestionable that the topic of justice is the basis for the right ordering of human society".

These are indications that capture the most problematic central core of our present time marked by the phenomenon of globalization, and that in an acute manner call for the involvement of Christians and, in general, all believers and men and women of good will -- with whom we intend to continue in a positive ecumenical, interreligious and human dialogue: What will be the evolution of economic systems? What will be the evolution of political systems and how will this evolution come about? What will be the future of cultural structures and of civilization? With what instruments, juridical and international, shall we take up these challenges, which come to touch upon the family and personal life of every individual, to the point that one's truest personal identity may be compromised? The questions could go on without end. We are somewhat like the individual who said, "Now that I know all the answers, they have changed the questions". The many questions, however, must not discourage us in seeking answers nor cause us to lose the hope that comes to us from Christ. We must start out from the awareness that the patrimony of Revelation and of natural law -- in this regard, the authoritative point made by Cardinal Angelo Sodano in his greeting to us is important -- permit us, with the instruments of *fides* and *ratio*, to look to the future with trust and hope.

4. Dearest friends, in order to respond adequately to the many questions of the men and women of our time, we also need you, we need Christian scholars, filled with *fides* and with *ratio*. We need you to be a continuous and shining example of *cultural charity*, which is absolutely necessary for the men and women of our day. With regard to this active involvement of yours, the already cited *Compendium* states: "*A significant contribution to the Church's social doctrine comes also from human sciences and the social sciences*³. *In view of that particular part of the truth that it may reveal, no branch of knowledge is excluded.* The Church recognizes and receives everything that contributes to the understanding of man in the ever broader, more fluid and more complex network of his social relationships. She is aware of the fact that a profound understanding of man does not come from theology alone, without the contributions of many branches of knowledge to which theology itself refers. *This attentive and constant openness to other branches of knowledge makes the Church's social doctrine reliable, concrete and relevant.* Thanks to the sciences, the Church can gain a more precise understanding of man in society, speak to the men and women of her own day in a more convincing manner and more effectively fulfil her task of incarnating in the conscience and social responsibility of our time, the word of God and the faith from which social doctrine flows⁴.

"This interdisciplinary dialogue also challenges the sciences to grasp the perspectives of meaning, value and commitment that the Church's social doctrine reveals and to 'open themselves to a broader horizon, aimed at serving the individual person who is acknowledged and loved in the fullness of his or her vocation'⁵" (No. 78; in this same regard, see also No. 320).

Let me conclude this brief reflection by inviting you to make your contribution to *sustaining the relaunching of the Church's social doctrine*. I wish therefore to indicate the *Compendium* as one of the most significant and updated instruments for keeping alive and relevant the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes*. In fidelity to an extraordinary tradition of Christian scholarship,

you too are called to be *actively involved with and in social doctrine*. The *Compendium* declares: "*The social doctrine belongs to the Church because the Church is the subject that formulates it, disseminates it and teaches it*. It is not a prerogative of a certain component of the ecclesial body but of the entire community: it is the expression of the way that the Church understands society and of her position regarding social structures and changes. The whole of the Church community -- priests, religious and laity -- participates in the formulation of this social doctrine, each according to the different tasks, charisms and ministries found within her.

These many and varied contributions -- which are themselves expressions of the 'supernatural appreciation of the faith (sensus fidei) of the whole people'⁶ -- are taken up, interpreted and formed into a unified whole by the Magisterium, which promulgates the social teaching as Church doctrine" (No. 79).

I entrust these good intentions of ours to the intercession of Mary, Queen of Peace.

¹ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 46: AAS 83 (1991), 850-851.

² Paul VI, Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens*, 42: AAS 63 (1971), 431.

³ In this regard, the foundation of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences is significant; in the *motu proprio* establishing the Academy one reads: "Social science research can effectively contribute to improving human relations, as has been shown by the progress achieved in various sectors of society especially during the century now drawing to a close. This is why the Church, ever concerned for man's true good, has turned with growing interest to this field of scientific research in order to obtain concrete information for fulfilling the duties of her Magisterium": John Paul II, *Motu Proprio Socialum Sscientiarum* (1 January 1994): AAS 86 (1994), 209.

⁴ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 54: AAS 83 (1991), 860.

⁵ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 59: AAS 83 (1991), 864.

⁶ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 12: AAS 57 (1965), 16.