

INTRODUCTION

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

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Your Eminences, Your Excellencies, Dear Participants,

I am very pleased to greet all of you with affection and to thank you for accepting the invitation to take part in the experience of this meeting, organized to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of *Gaudium et Spes*. Our thought and our gratitude go, in the first place, to the Holy Father who was among the drafters of the conciliar Constitution and who makes continual reference to it in his illuminating Magisterium, pointing to it as the surest and most fruitful guide in outlining the relationship between the Church and the world. A special word of thanks goes to His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Secretary of State, who, by his presence and words, gives us evidence of the benevolent attention that he constantly shows to the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. A particular thank-you goes also to the speakers who will help us during these intense days awaiting us to discern better the extraordinary heritage of truth and light that *Gaudium et Spes* continues to be for the whole Church and the world. Finally, a thank-you to the Representatives of the Institutes of Catholic Universities who have brought to bear all their insightful assistance in setting up this International Conference in a worthy manner. Working with them has proven to be productive and profitable from every point of view, from identifying the content to putting into place an interesting and effective method of work that in fact highlights the interdisciplinary character that is typical of the Church's social doctrine. This becomes fully evident in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, recently published by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (cf. No. 76).

Our meeting will open with a reflection, presented by His Eminence Cardinal Claudio Hummes, Archbishop of Sao Paulo, which will show us the theological and ecclesiological foundations of *Gaudium et Spes*. His introductory reflection, of a general character, will allow us to focus on the various themes that will be dealt with as we proceed. Professor Andrea Riccardi was given the task of outlining the historical perspective within which the conciliar Constitution is to be placed. The following themes, all of which are characteristic of *Gaudium et Spes*, will then be introduced: justice in the political order, presented by Dr. Rubens Recupero; justice in the economic order, presented by Dr. Guy Pognon; the family in the social order, presented by Dr. Helen M. Alvaré.

Each plenary session will be followed by seminar work sessions in which a speaker will respond to the reflections proposed by a presenter. This intricate order of organization is of proven usefulness, even if it can give the impression of being rather complicated, and will in any event allow for a broad participation of all in the work of the Conference.

The Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*^a represents a significant response of the Church to the expectations of the modern world. In it there is reflected "a new concept of how to be a community of believers and people of God... It aroused new interest regarding the doctrine... (concerning) the witness and life of Christians, as authentic ways of making the presence of God in the world visible"^b. In fact, *Gaudium et Spes* shows the face of the Church "truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds"^c, a Church that walks with all humanity and that is subject together with the world to the same earthly destiny, but which at the same time serves as "a leaven and as a kind of soul for human society as it is to be renewed in Christ and transformed into God's family"^d.

Gaudium et Spes reflects on the Church's mission, dealing with themes concerning culture, social-economic life, marriage and family, the political community, peace and the community of peoples, in the light of a Christian anthropological perspective. Everything is seen with the human person as the starting point and as the direction to be taken: for man is "the only creature on earth which God willed for itself"^e. Everything -- society, its structures and its development -- must be directed to "consolidating and increasing the qualities of the human person"^f. The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church states: "For the first time, the Magisterium of the Church, at its highest level, speaks at great length about the different temporal aspects of Christian life: 'It must be recognized that the attention given by the Constitution to social, psychological, political, economic, moral and religious changes has increasingly stimulated... the Church's pastoral concern for men's problems and dialogue with the world'" (No. 96).

During these days of intense work we must all accept the invitation that *Gaudium et Spes* makes to us: to promote the human person by means of a passionate willingness to work for justice. Man is called to bring about a society in which everyone is given their due in respect of the common good: this is impossible if we do not take into proper account that a more just world is a world "fashioned ... more to man's surpassing dignity" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 91).

The already cited Compendium states: "Justice is particularly important in the present-day context, in which the individual value of the person, his dignity and his rights -- despite proclaimed intentions -- are seriously threatened by the widespread tendency to make exclusive use of criteria of utility and ownership. Justice too, on the basis of these criteria, is considered in a reductionist manner, whereas it acquires a fuller and more authentic meaning in Christian anthropology. Justice, in fact, is not merely a simple human convention, because what is 'just' is not first determined by the law but by the profound identity of the human being" (No. 202). For this same reason, justice is destined to be surpassed by charity. Charity is the origin of that feeling of being "truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds", a feeling that represents perhaps the most characteristic dimension of the spirit of *Gaudium et Spes*, one of its most precious legacies forty years later.

Thank you, and may the work undertaken be successful!

^a Cf. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, AAS 58 (1966), 1025-1120.

^b Congregation for Catholic Education, *Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church's Social Doctrine in the Formation of Priests*, 24: Vatican Polyglot Press, Rome 1988, p. 28.

^c Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 1: AAS 58 (1966), 1026.

^d Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 40: AAS 58 (1966), 1058.

^e Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 24: AAS 58 (1966), 1045.

^f Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 25: AAS 58 (1966), 1045.