

## GREETING OF THE CARDINAL SECRETARY OF STATE

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

Cardinal Angelo Sodano  
Secretary of State of the Holy See

Vatican City, New Synod Hall, 16 March 2005

Your Eminences, Your Excellencies, Dear Friends,

I do not wish to "carry water to the sea", adding a comment to the eloquent opening address given by the Supreme Pontiff for the work of this International Conference, for which a large number of specialists in the Church's social doctrine are gathered in this New Synod Hall.

I would like merely to express heartfelt thanks to the President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Cardinal Renato R. Martino, and equally heartfelt thanks to the scholars from the Institutes of Catholic Universities who have organized the scientific part of this event, and who nurture great passion for the Church's teaching in the social sphere.

The theme of the Conference, "*The Call to Justice, the Legacy of Gaudium et Spes Forty Years Later*", is at the heart of this teaching. In reading anew the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, we cannot fail to feel called to a new commitment in the world, a commitment that is no less necessary nor less incumbent upon us today than in the past: *Gaudium et Spes* can truly be understood as a call, a vocation.

The Church, in fact, has received as a legacy from God the integral vocation of man, which consists in his surpassing dignity. The Church for her part calls her sons and daughters and all people of good will to a commitment that is in conformity with this surpassing dignity. And it is precisely from this dignity that there arises an important dimension of our commitment to justice, according to the guidelines found in *Gaudium et Spes*.

The vocation to God establishes us in our surpassing dignity, and acting in conformity with this is our first vocation. There is found in every person an "order of things". Human dignity belongs to this order of things. Freedom and rights are founded on the respect of this order, and we do well to recall that, just as truth is the foundation of freedom, so rights too are founded on duties.

John Paul II, in his memorable address to the General Assembly of the United Nations on 5 October 1995, spoke of a common "grammar" available to everyone, on which

everyone can base themselves in order to understand reality. The Pope explained: "There are indeed universal human rights, rooted in the nature of the person, rights which reflect the objective and inviolable demands of a universal moral law ... If we want a century of violent coercion to be succeeded by a century of persuasion, we must find a way to discuss the human future intelligibly. The universal moral law written on the human heart is precisely that kind of 'grammar' which is needed if the world is to engage this discussion of its future".

So, I believe that one of the principal tasks that we can take on today, forty years after the publication of *Gaudium et Spes* -- if we wish to place ourselves in the tradition of that document and respect its vocational character -- is that of culturally relaunching the value of the natural law, as a condition of true human freedom and as an occasion for dialogue between people in the common acknowledgment of a set of shared values. Shared because they are true, and not true because they are shared.

Entrusting this task also to all those present, it is my hope that the scholars taking part in this International Conference will, in these days of fruitful work, be able to respond to their vocation, the vocation to show to the men and women of today the ultimate foundation of justice, which is truth, that "order of things" -- the "social order", "*ordo rerum*", that is spoken of in No. 25 of *Gaudium et Spes* -- that order of things that has been willed by God's creative love.

The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, which we wish to commemorate today, bears a title that opens our hearts to hope for the future of humanity. *Gaudium et Spes*, joy and hope. In fact, as I have been told, the first draft of the document began with the words *Gaudium et Luctus*, joy and grief. The change that was made is therefore a good sign. It opens our hearts to hope for the progress of humanity, if we are able to act in conformity with God's plan.

In concluding, I say to all: may your work be successful!