



# The Holy See

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**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE MEETING  
ON THE 40th ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE PASTORAL CONSTITUTION "GAUDIUM ET SPES"**

*To my Venerable Brother Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino  
President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace*

1. The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace has sponsored, jointly with other international academic institutions and with a timely initiative, a special Conference to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Pastoral Constitution of the Second Vatican Council on the Church in the Modern World. The symposium has a dynamic theme: *"The call to justice. The legacy of Gaudium et Spes 40 years later"*.

As I offer my cordial greeting to you, Venerable Brother, and to all those who are taking part in the Meeting, I cannot but emphasize the special importance of this event for the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace: indeed, the Council was established at the express request of the Council Fathers, formulated in the Document itself (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 90). In these years, the Pontifical Council has played an important role in deepening and developing the Conciliar teachings on justice and peace and well deserves the gratitude of the entire Ecclesial Community.

2. The theme presented at the Symposium, *"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*, n. 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 (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 63; *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, nn. 213-214).

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. n. 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. Therefore, how can we not approve and encourage those men and women of good will who spare no efforts to create conditions of greater justice in the world? (cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, nn. 495, 498). Indeed, a true peace on earth entails the firm determination to respect others, individuals and peoples, in their dignity, and constant willingness to increase brotherly solidarity between the members of the human family (cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, n. 194).

3. *Gaudium et Spes* does not reduce its teaching to this: in this Constitution the Council maintains that peace is "also the fruit of love, for love goes beyond what justice can ensure.... Therefore, all Christians are earnestly to speak the truth in love (cf. Eph 4: 15) and join with all peace-loving men in pleading for peace and trying to bring it about" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 78).

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" (*ibid.*, n. 78).

4. I have made Cardinal Angelo Sodano, my Secretary of State, responsible for expressing these thoughts and for conveying to you, Venerable Brother, and to all the participants at this Conference, my appreciation of the noble intentions at the root of this Meeting which is taking place on the important Conciliar Document.

With these sentiments I invoke upon all those who are taking part in the Symposium the guidance and illumination of the Holy Spirit. I am certain that the work of these days will help to make clear that: "With the passing of the years, the Council Documents have lost nothing of their value or brilliance" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 57).

As I entrust the sponsors, speakers and participants to the motherly protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, with affection I send you all my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of joy and peace in the Lord.

*From the Vatican, 15 March 2005*

**JOHN PAUL II**

