

## What is *Gaudium et Spes*?

Widely heralded as a landmark of Catholic social teaching, the wide-ranging document *Gaudium et Spes (Joy and Hope)*, promulgated during the Second Vatican Council in 1965, focuses on the role of the Church and its members in the world in areas ranging from politics to peace to the challenges of contemporary atheism to morality and service to the community. The document ultimately points to an authentic meaning of life that can be found only in Christ.

While critiquing the major technological and social changes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Gaudium et Spes* calls all people to a greater sense of authentic humanism, that is, to a sense of a role in the world that is based on a Christian humanism that preaches self-giving rather than self-promotion and is firmly rooted in the Gospels.

*Gaudium et Spes* states clearly that one cannot live up to or develop his potential except by relating to others (12). In the words of the document itself: “The best way to fulfill one’s obligations of justice and love is to contribute to the common good according to one’s means and the needs of others, even to the point of fostering and helping public and private organizations devoted to bettering the conditions of life” (30).

*Gaudium et Spes* had a great impact on Catholic social teaching, and it is indeed telling that Pope John Paul II has cited sections 22 and 24 of *Gaudium et Spes* more often than he has cited any other Vatican II document. He has used this document as a key element in many of his own encyclicals including *Fides et Ratio (Faith and Reason)*. Speaking in 1995, the pope noted: “I took up the legacy of [*Gaudium et Spes*] and wished to confirm that the nature and destiny of humanity and of the world can be definitively revealed only in the light of the crucified and risen Christ.” As a Polish bishop at the Council, Pope John Paul II, then known as Archbishop Karol Wojtyła, was part of the committee which drafted the document.

