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RECURRING THEMES: SOCIAL JUSTICE AND GAUDIUM ET SPES

John Ozolins

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I argue that Gaudium et Spes is an extraordinarily optimistic document, which while it seriously misread the economic future, powerfully reiterates the central social teaching of the Church. Human beings are fulfilled as persons through their membership of the community and the State exists to promote the common good. The vitality of the document is reflected in the principles it enunciates about the nature of human beings, their relationship to one another and to their common humanity. The aim of economic activity is the fulfilment of persons, not the accumulation of wealth and in making this claim, I argue that the document is radically at odds with contemporary libertarian conceptions of the human person and the economic rationalist agendas of both business and government.

INTRODUCTION

Gaudium et Spes, it has been argued, is a radical and daring document, both for its scope and for significantly departing from the usual custom of addressing only Catholics in Church documents by speaking also to “all persons of good will”. [\[1\]](#)

In its tone it is revolutionary and optimistic about the future, but remains faithful to the principles of social justice enunciated in previous documents and encyclicals. Taken together with *Lumen*

Gentium, it provides a coherent picture of how the Kingdom of God is to be realised in the earthly kingdom in which human beings find themselves. It is a revolutionary document because it articulates what in practical terms it means to be a Christian in the modern world. It elaborates a picture of the preciousness of human life [2] and what this means in terms of the social and political organisation of society. It argues for a communitarian conception of society in which human fulfilment lies in collaborative participation in the creation and development of the common good.

It is an unusually optimistic document, perhaps reflecting the post Second World War period in which it was written, an era when economic growth seemed to be likely to last forever with full employment and working hours shrinking. [3] It begins by noting the profound and rapid changes that human beings were experiencing and the great growth in the generation of wealth, resources and economic power. Change also was occurring in traditional communities, with more and more societies adopting an industrial model and cities continuing to expand. [4] Populations were expanding too in the long 'baby boomer' period following the Second World War. Despite this, it observes that there is still acute poverty and hunger in the world, and that the world is divided into rich and poor. [5] This is not seen as an intractable problem, however, rather one which people of good will are going to be able to solve, given time. There is a sense in the document that the goal beyond history, the coming of the Kingdom, is close at hand and human beings are engaged in the final push to its realisation. [6]

Philosophically, what is of interest in the document is the articulation of an understanding of the nature of what it is to be a human person living in society. It articulates an understanding of the common good, and proposes a social and political order in which, though the individual is central, his or her well being and fulfilment can only be realised through living in community. The needs of the individual are subordinated to the needs of the community, but only because it is only in this way that the needs of the individual are going to be served.

Gaudium et Spes seen from a modern perspective, is powerfully counter-cultural, particularly in its articulation of the role of governments and business in serving ordinary human beings. It provides a strong case against economic rationalism and for a radical redistribution of wealth. In this it is not alone, but is consistent with the Church's social teaching, about the nature of the common good and how human fulfilment is to be achieved.

There is an extraordinary vitality about the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, missing in large measure from later documents and encyclicals. This might be because it is a document locked in its own time, an optimistic moment in the World's history, when all things appeared to be possible. Later documents emerging out of the oil shock of the 1970s and later periods which saw the erosion of the welfare state and the installation of Thatcherism were faced with more intractable problems. That most of these could be said to be at least partly due to an ignoring of the warnings already sounded by *Gaudium et Spes* and other documents is a sign of how much it did get right in its analysis of the world situation and what ought to be done to correct it.

It is not possible to do justice to such a theologically and philosophically rich document as this in a few short paragraphs. In this paper I will concentrate on reflecting on the way in which *Gaudium et Spes* develops a communitarian conception of the person, gives an account of the common good and shows how these imply an economic order in society which is directed towards a fair distribution of material goods. It will also be shown that in keeping with other Catholic Social teaching that it provides a radically different conception of the purposes of commerce to that offered by economic rationalists.

THE COMMUNITARIAN NATURE OF THE HUMAN PERSON

Gaudium et Spes recognises that human beings are made in the image and likeness of God and because of this are the centre of all things on earth. [\[7\]](#)

Human beings are flawed creatures [\[8\]](#), but are in their innermost being, social creatures, who without the ability to relate to others, cannot live or develop their potential. The progress of the human person and the advance of society itself are mutually dependent. [\[9\]](#) This means that the goal of all social institutions is the human person, because it is through these that each person's development is nurtured. Social life is not external to the human person, but is an integral part of what it is to be a human being. Human beings realise their full potential as persons through the complex and myriad social relationships in which they are enmeshed. Of course it is not only these relationships alone that enable people to realise their potential, but also their actions. The myriad social relationships in which persons are involved give rise to duties and obligations and hence to actions of various types and it is through the carrying out of these actions that human persons begin to develop their gifts and talents. From the narrative of our actions, a picture of who we are as persons emerges. What is striking in *Gaudium et Spes* is the image of human beings linked together and sharing a common destiny. [\[10\]](#)



COMMUNITARIANISM AND THE COMMON GOOD

As already proposed, human beings are fulfilled as persons through their membership of a community, and theologically, it is in and through Christ that the community reaches its apotheosis. [\[11\]](#) Salvation is not reached alone, but through participation in the community, the people of God who are joined to one another through Christ. There is, then, an understanding that the communitarian character of human beings is developed and consummated in the world of Jesus Christ. As a result, the fate of individuals is tied up with those of their fellow human beings and this interconnectedness means that what we achieve as individuals is meaningless unless it also contributes to the common good. *Gaudium et Spes* puts this in the following way: “*Man's social nature makes it evident that the progress of the human person and the advance of society itself hinge on one another*” [\[12\]](#)

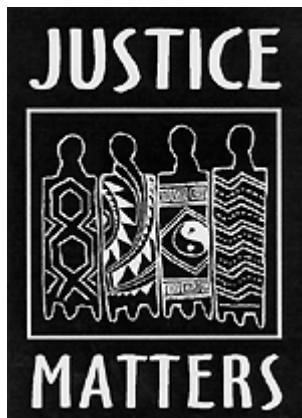
, and further on, “*...God did not create man for life in isolation, but for the formation of social unity*” [\[13\]](#)

. This does not mean that human beings are subordinated as individuals to the community understood as somehow personified itself and as having its own ends to pursue. It is rather, to be understood as existing in order that the individual human person can be fulfilled in and through the development of his or her talents in the service of others, who themselves exist as ends in themselves. The community exists to serve human beings; it is not the case that human beings exist to serve the community. There is, moreover, a recognition in this thought of the interrelationship between human beings. *Gaudium et Spes* says: “*Every day human interdependence grows more tightly drawn and spreads by degrees over the whole world. As a result the common good, that is, the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfilment, today takes on an increasingly universal complexion and consequently involves rights and duties with respect to the whole human race. Every social group must take account of the needs and legitimate aspirations of other groups, and even of the general welfare of the entire human family.*” [\[14\]](#)

Broadly speaking, the conception of the common good espoused by *Gaudium et Spes* is consistent with the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition which argues that the common good consists in the community being able to work together to provide each person with the necessities of life. Aristotle sees the state as a community of equals aiming for the best life

possible. [15] Each person has their part to play in the community, so that there is a need for, amongst others, artisans, farmers, soldiers, religious leaders and judges. The notion of the common good, however, differs from that proposed by Plato in the *Laws*. [16] Plato's model of the common good gives priority to the state in terms of the control and distribution of wealth and property rather than to the individual. Aristotle, on the other hand, while arguing for a fair and equitable distribution of wealth and property, does not see such an arrangement as particularly workable. For Aristotle it is much better for individuals to have responsibility for the disposal of wealth and of property for individuals are more likely to look after what is their own rather than what is owned in common. [17] There is, however, an understanding that ultimately property and wealth are common goods to be shared.

The concept of the common good is also shared with the great encyclical of Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, and Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno* and echoes their radicality. *Rerum Novarum* claims that the role of the State is the promotion of the common good, and so is at odds with a minimalist social contract view of the role of the State. The end of society is to make human beings better and governments have a responsibility to promote religion and morality, as well as do their utmost to promote the welfare and interests of the poor. Moreover, the State has an equal responsibility to the working class to ensure that they receive their due. Public administration must make sure that it sees to the comfort and welfare all citizens, that is to say, distributive justice must ensure that wealth in the nation is fairly apportioned. [18] Although the encyclical does not favour undue interference by the State in the lives of citizens, it nevertheless rejects the notion of 'laissez faire' liberal models of government. States have to interfere where it is necessary to ensure the fair distribution of wealth. In some respects, *Rerum Novarum* anticipates the 'principle of subsidiarity' of *Quadragesimo Anno*. This principle proposes that wherever possible, people should be allowed to make decisions for themselves without interference from a higher authority. [19]



The view of *Gaudium et Spes* is also consistent with *Mater et Magister*, John XXIII's encyclical on which, arguably, much of the Pastoral Constitution is based. John XXIII holds that the whole reason for the existence of the State is for the realisation of the common good. Its task is to ensure that every human being has sufficient resources for his or her well being. This means that the State has to act to ensure that material goods and services are equitably distributed. More than this, the State has to protect the rights of its citizens and to work actively for an improvement in the material condition of their lives. [20] This theme is elaborated also in *Pacem in Terris*, which discusses the connection between the common good and political authority. John XXIII postulates that the existence of public authority as means of promoting the common good is a principle of the moral order. [21]

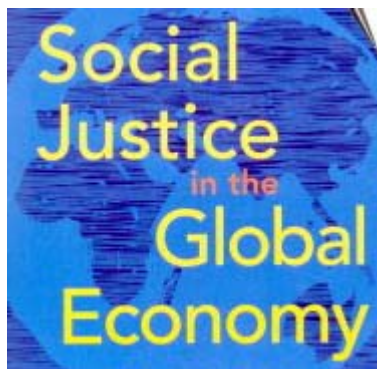
Gaudium et Spes argues that all the earth and what it contains is intended for all human beings. This means that everything that is created is held in common – there is no absolute sense of ownership of property. Every person has a right to sufficient of the earth's resources to keep him or herself. Indeed, a person in extreme necessity has the right to take from the riches of others what he himself needs. [22]

Although this point is made powerfully by *Gaudium et Spes*, it appears in just as strong language in Aquinas, who quotes St. Basil: "If you acknowledge them [your temporal goods] as coming from God is He unjust because He apportions them unequally? Why are you rich while another is poor, unless it be that you may have the merit of a good stewardship, and he the reward of patience? It is the hungry man's bread that you withhold, the naked man's cloak that you have stored away, the shoe of the barefoot that you have left to rot, the money of the needy that you have buried underground: and so you injure as many as you might help." [23] Aquinas condemns the rich man for thinking things belong to him, because their source ultimately is God. [24] The Pastoral Constitution puts it in the following words: "The Fathers and Doctors of

the Church held this opinion, teaching that men are obliged to come to the relief of the poor and to do so not merely out of their superfluous goods.(10) If one is in extreme necessity, he has the right to procure for himself what he needs out of the riches of others.(11) Since there are so many people prostrate with hunger in the world, this sacred council urges all, both individuals and governments, to remember the aphorism of the Fathers, "Feed the man dying of hunger, because if you have not fed him, you have killed him,"(12) and really to share and employ their earthly goods, according to the ability of each, especially by supporting individuals or peoples with the aid by which they may be able to help and develop themselves." [25]

The concept of the common good and of a natural moral order which obliges us to act towards one another with charity is a constant theme in *Gaudium et Spes*. Moreover, it is not to be exercised in only specific areas, but in every area of life. We have an obligation to give help to the old, sick and abandoned, the hungry, and significantly in view of Australia's present attitude towards them, refugees. [26] We also have obligations to actively oppose whatever is directed against life and the flourishing of the human person. The obvious examples here are such crimes such as murder and genocide, as well as abortion and euthanasia, and those things which insult human dignity, such as, slavery, subhuman living conditions, and arbitrary imprisonment. Included also are less obvious modes of oppression, which resonate more strongly today, namely, working conditions in which human persons are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than free and responsible persons. These, says *Gaudium et Spes*, are infamies indeed, for they poison human society. Surprisingly, it also asserts that such infamies do more harm to those who practise them than those who suffer from the injury. [27]

This is an interesting thought, for while we are generally prepared to recognise that evil actions harm the perpetrator because they diminish his or her own humanity, we emphasise, rightly, the injustice suffered by the victim and seek to redress it. To suggest that the perpetrator suffers greater injury somehow seems to be overstating the case. A murder victim, for example, has lost his life, while a murderer has not. It would be too much of a digression to follow this thought through, but it is suggestive of a theme consistently propounded throughout the document, namely our interrelatedness as human beings and of the contribution each and every human being makes to the common good. Hence, every evil action erodes the common good and affronts human dignity. In so doing, its effect reaches much further than just the act itself and the victim of it. There is no individualistic morality, everyone has to contribute to the common good and this will be in myriad small ways. [28]



Several important themes emerge out of the discussion of the common good which frame much of the discussion of socio-economic problems which *Gaudium et Spes* addresses. There is, firstly, the idea that every person is entitled to the common good in which we all share and to which we all contribute in different ways. Secondly, there is the claim that we are all, creatures made in the image and likeness of God and sharers, through Christ, in His Divine Life, responsible for one another. This means that we have a responsibility for looking after each other. Thirdly, there is the thought that the sharing of our common goods should be directed towards helping others to develop themselves. Finally, there is the view that it is consistent with human dignity that each person be encouraged to take responsibility for him or herself. There is, of course, a further question to be asked in relation to this final point about the shape that these responsibilities and obligations ought to take. [29]

In asserting that gradually the human family is recognizing that it comprises a single world community and is making itself so, *Gaudium et Spes* is far too hopeful. [30]

The idea that we are moving to a global community, though often touted as a reality, is further from realization now than in the sixties. Globalisation, which is a feature of the early twenty-first century, has not been an engine for greater world unity, rather, it has exacerbated the division between the rich nations and the poor nations. This is recognized in John

Paul II's encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* where he explicitly criticises the complicity of both Eastern and Western ideologies for maintaining for their own strategic ends the division of the world into rich and poor nations. [\[31\]](#)

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



While it is recognised that human beings are more precious for themselves than for what they do or what they have, work and economic activity are important for human growth and wellbeing. For this reason, the growth of the earthly kingdom can contribute to the growth of Christ's kingdom. In all instances, however, the accumulation of wealth, of increased economic development, are subordinate to the growth of personal relationships, justice and of human fulfilment. [\[32\]](#) *Gaudium et Spes* can be

criticised for misjudging the extent of human progress and economic development and supposing that there is a kind of linear, Hegelian movement towards fulfilment, but in its application of the notion of the common good to economic activity it provides us with a powerful rejoinder to economic rationalism. It is in the fourth chapter of the first section that a consideration of the role of the Church in the modern world is undertaken.

Here one can detect something of a revolutionary tone. Given its mandate to reveal the meaning of human life as being directed towards God, and understanding human beings as being made in the image and likeness of God, the Church is justified in safeguarding the dignity of human nature against all tides of opinion. [\[33\]](#)



It is also justified in championing human rights. [\[34\]](#) *Gaudium et Spes* says that although the Church was given no specific mission to advance the political, social and economic orders, nevertheless, but because these are not separable from what it is to be human, it has a role to play to help the poor and needy. [\[35\]](#)

In all of this, its goal is the unity of all human beings in Jesus Christ. In saying this, the Pastoral Constitution does not see any separation between one's religious duties and one's duties to one's fellow human beings.



There is no boundary to be drawn between religious and professional and social life because it is vital for one's values to permeate every facet of one's life. This is a significant statement, for its practical consequence is that there is no separation of one's religious life from one's public life. Moreover, it is contended that the split between faith and daily life may be seen as one of the most serious errors of the modern age. This has implications for those engaged in public life, for it means that where someone

cannot in conscience support a particular government proposal, he or she ought not do so, just because it is the party line. What is most evident here is the notion of social action: the Christian is not to sit idly by while human rights are trampled. [\[36\]](#)

An important consideration, however, is how far such activism is to extend, for this is far from clear. Certainly many nineteenth and twentieth century Christian reformers have taken it to extend very far indeed. Nevertheless, in some respects, particularly in Australia, there is a question here of how far in the years following Vatican II the Church has lacked the courage of its convictions, particularly in its failure to galvanise action against the steady erosion of the daily wages and living conditions of workers, as well as public morality. Perhaps the message of *Gaudium et Spes* was misunderstood in Australia: in the engagement with the modern world, some took it to mean that the Church was to become indistinguishable from the modern world, adopting its secular outlook, rather than remaining true to its own convictions. [37] There is, then, the question of how far the Church's mission has been compromised by the readiness to adapt to the modern world.



This is perhaps evident in the Australian context by the fact that although Catholicism has become the largest mainstream Christian denomination in Australia, overtaking Anglicanism, for many Catholics, this has meant an adoption of the views and mores of the surrounding secular culture, so that there is nothing recognisably Catholic about any of their beliefs. There is, for example, plenty of evidence to suggest that the attitudes and beliefs of many who classify themselves as Catholics on various social questions such as abortion, divorce, euthanasia, Aboriginal reconciliation, and the treatment of refugees differ very little, if at all, from mainstream secular society. Certainly whatever position is adopted on these issues has often very little to do with religious convictions. Indeed it is often the case that these are wrongly dismissed as not worth considering because they are religious convictions.

Culture is crucial in the development of the human person, for it is only through participating in community that a person can come to a full and authentic humanity. This is because it is only through interaction with others that one has the opportunity to fully develop one's talents and capacities. Public institutions and customs contribute to this development and these will be different in different communities and so human persons become unique individuals through their involvement in the particular society to which they belong. [38] It is vital, therefore, that religious beliefs and convictions contribute to the formation of common culture.

Gaudium et Spes argues that the living conditions of modern life and the advances in the natural, human and social sciences have profoundly changed the way in which we think about what it is to be human. Moreover, it claims, various global forces are bringing about a greater uniformity of culture to the world – the idea of 'mass culture'. It suggests that bit by a bit a more universal form of human culture is developing. The circumstances of the life of modern man have been so profoundly changed in their social and cultural aspects, that we can speak of a new age of human history.

The idea that the world is becoming more unified and that we are witnessing the birth of a new humanism, in which persons are defined in relation their obligations and responsibilities to their fellow brothers and sisters [39] seems to have been more an expression of hope than an accurate analysis of the world situation. Arguably, the tendency towards mass culture is a result of the proliferation of mass American culture throughout the world, rather than a genuine growth of mutual understanding of a common humanity. A different tone is apparent in both *Evangelium Vitae* and *Veritatis Splendor*, where it is clear that amongst the major problems of the the modern world is the "culture of death" and the lack of concern for truth. In *Evangelium Vitae*, for example, the opening paragraphs affirm the importance of a respect for life from its very beginning. While it may be true that we have witnessed the birth of a new humanism, it is one without any sense of the sacred or any place for God. *Evangelium Vitae* agrees with this assessment, saying, "a new cultural climate is developing and taking hold, which gives crimes against life a new and--if possible--even more sinister character, giving rise to further grave concern: broad sectors of public opinion justify

certain crimes against life in the name of the rights of individual freedom, and on this basis they claim not only exemption from punishment but even authorization by the State, so that these things can be done with total freedom and indeed with the free assistance of health-care systems.” [40] In *Veritatis Splendor*, John Paul II warns of modern currents of thought which discount the value of truth and so advocate moral relativism. “At the root of these presuppositions [anthropological and ethical] is the more or less obvious influence of currents of thought which end by detaching human freedom from its essential and constitutive relationship to truth.” [41] These passages indicate a very different and more sober assessment of the condition of the human person in the modern world to that expressed in *Gaudium et Spes*.

This is not to say that *Gaudium et Spes* was not aware of the growing gap between rich and poor nations, not only in terms of wealth, but also in the increasing sophistication of technology, of culture, of communication, of science. It is the huge gap between developing nations and the developed Western nations with which John Paul II is concerned in his encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*. In this encyclical John Paul II criticises the West for its excessive materialism, echoing in this respect Paul VI’s *Populorum Progressio*, written some five years after *Gaudium et Spes*. It is apparent that the optimism which is expressed in *Gaudium et Spes* has given way to a much less sanguine outlook.



In its discussion of socio-economic life, *Gaudium et Spes* argues, consistently with its views on the nature of common good, that the dignity of the human person, along with the welfare of society should be the source, centre and purpose of all socio-economic activity. [42] This is in stark contrast to libertarian views such as those of Friedman, who contends that the purpose of business is to make profits for the shareholders and nothing more. [43] While it is recognised that at the time there were two

different kinds of economies operating in the world – the capitalist and communist – the salient point that *Gaudium et Spes* makes is that too great a concentration on economic matters leads people to lose sight of the purpose of the economy, which is to serve human needs. “Many people, especially in economically advanced areas, seem, as it were, to be ruled by economics, so that almost their entire personal and social life is permeated with a certain economic way of thinking. Such is true both of nations that favor a collective economy and of others.” [44] Writing at a time when the long postwar boom was still to end, there is an optimism about the possibility of diminishing social inequality through economic growth – a possibility dashed just a short decade later with the coming of the oil crisis of the seventies as well as in the eighties the extremism of Thatcherism and Reaganomics.

Gaudium et Spes reiterates a position reflected in encyclicals both before and after it [45]

that economic activity is it at the service of human beings and that everyone has a stake in this activity. It should not be entrusted solely to governments to carry out, [46] nor should the basic rights of individuals be subordinated to the collective or to the corporation. In agreement with the great encyclicals of the past, such as *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*, labour takes pre-eminence over other elements of economic life, such as capital. “Human labor which is expended in the production and exchange of goods or in the performance of economic services is superior to the other elements of economic life, for the latter have only the nature of tools.” [47]

This is because not only do people normally support themselves and their families through their work, but they are also able to help others through their charitable works. They contribute in other ways, such as through taxation and the provision of goods and services, to the building up of the community more generally through their labour. There is a strong warning against the exploitation of workers and an exhortation to allow workers the opportunity to unfold their own

abilities and personalities through the performance of their work. An important responsibility is the obligation of those in authority in government and business to help the citizens of a community to find opportunities for adequate employment. [48] Privatization which serves only to increase profits and to rob workers of their livelihood is to be avoided.

It is apparent that since the advent of economic rationalism, that the idea that productive work should be adapted to the needs of the person has been completely discarded. Moreover, there has been a steady erosion of wages and conditions with a concomitant rise in the amount of productive work demanded from employees. Major corporations have engaged in deliberate downsizing – even in the face of mounting profit. Telstra, for example, in the same breath as it announced record profits was also announcing another round of job cuts. Moreover, the idea that one should have a balance of work and leisure has long been abandoned for unless one is unemployed, few workers today are in a position to enjoy adequate rest and leisure. [49]

In keeping with the principle of subsidiarity, *Gaudium et Spes* envisages enterprises in which persons work together as free and independent human beings and this means active participation by everyone in the running of the business. Moreover, since many decisions regarding the social and economic conditions on which the welfare of workers and their families depend are taken by institutions at a higher level, workers should also have a share in controlling these. In practice, this means that workers have the right to join unions, and when necessary, to strike. [50]

One wonders what the members of the Synod would have thought of the Howard's abortive attempt to break the maritime unions through the training of a strike breaking workforce in Dubai.

Gaudium et Spes argues that investment should be directed towards providing employment and sufficient income for human beings. In this, it follows both Aristotle and Aquinas, who hold that money should serve persons by ensuring that they are able to make a living. Aristotle sees wealth as an instrumental good in that it enables a household to have the goods that members of it require in order to live a good life; he does not see its acquisition beyond this as having any point, even though he recognises that many individuals will pursue wealth for its own sake. This they do because they conflate having sufficient for the management of their household with the pursuit of wealth and so see the purpose of their lives as the acquisition of more and more money. In this quest, he says, they use their faculties in ways not intended by nature. "...some men turn every quality or art into means of getting wealth; this they conceive to be the end, and to the promotion of the end they think all things must contribute." [51]

There is a familiar line taken on ownership of property and material goods, as may be found in *Rerum Novarum* and other documents. These are important in that they enable people to express themselves and through ownership to have security to act freely. However, private ownership of property is not absolute, as where it is left idle while people starve, land reforms should be instituted so that those who are willing to work the land may do so and thus provide themselves with a decent standard of living. Radically, it is proposed that where the common good demands the seizure of land, that it be taken and the former owners recompensed, according to circumstances. [52]

Throughout *Gaudium et Spes* we see a radical call that all human activity has at its purpose the serving of human beings so that they may be fulfilled and that in this manner they become more fully children of God. Economic activity serves this end and so we have a markedly different understanding of the purpose of work, of commercial activity and the creation of wealth. Anything that divides people into rich and poor is to be avoided. Whilst no particular form of government is explicitly recommended, it is clear that its main task is to ensure that the common good is served. In this we can see a direct conflict with some of the purposes of government and of business in contemporary society. The aim of business is not profit, but human fulfilment, the aim of government is not the creation of conditions conducive for multinational corporations to operate efficiently, but to further the common good of each

individual. This does not mean arranging matters so that the rich are able to get richer while the poor get poorer, a situation which is true of modern capitalist society.

CONCLUSION

Flowing out of a richly informed Christian theology, *Gaudium et Spes* expresses its solidarity with the poor and underprivileged. In this, it follows in the footsteps of other important church documents, particularly the encyclicals, starting with *Rerum Novarum*. Looking back forty years it is evident that it was too hopeful about human progress and seriously misread the economic climate which came to prevail a few years after it was written. Despite this, it is the principles which it enunciated about the nature of human beings and their relationship to each other and to their common humanity that lend to it its power and vitality. Economic activity has as its point and purpose the fulfilment of human beings and so the furtherance of the common good. The question with which we are left is what, if anything, can be done to implement the principles which *Gaudium et Spes* and Catholic Social Teaching in general enunciate in a world dominated by a cult of individualism and economic rationalism.

[1] O'Malley, J.W. "Vatican II: Historical Perspectives on its Uniqueness and Interpretation" in Richard, L., Harrington, D. and O'Malley, J.W. (eds.) *Vatican II: The Unfinished Agenda*, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987, 25

[2] "A man is more precious for what he is than for what he has." See *Gaudium et Spes* in Abbott, W. (ed.) *The Documents of Vatican II*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966, part I, Chapter III, #35; This thought is articulated more fully and theologically in *Lumen Gentium*, where the faithful, including their pastors, are described as the "people of God", a new race, a royal priesthood, redeemed by Christ. See *Lumen Gentium* in Abbott, W. (ed.) *Op. Cit.*, Chapter II, # 9. While the people of God do not include everyone, nevertheless, all human beings are called to belong to the people of God. The Church strives to bring all humanity to Christ. (#13)

[3] But compare this to the pessimism of the report of the Club of Rome in 1972. See Meadows, D. H. *The Limits to Growth*, London, 1972. On the matter of a predicted increase in leisure, see Jones, B. *Sleepers Awake*, 4th Ed. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995

[4] *Gaudium et Spes* [henceforth GS], #4- #6

[5] GS #4

[6] Dulles writes, "The Church presses forward, full of optimism, toward a goal beyond history.it is sustained by the glorious vision of the final kingdom in which God will be all in all (1Cor.15:18)" See Dulles, A. "The Church" in Abbott, W. (ed.) *Op. cit.*, 11.

[7] GS #12

[8] GS #13

[9] GS #25

[10] As God did not create man for life in isolation, but for the formation of social unity, so also "it has pleased God to make men holy and save them not merely as individuals, without bond or link between them, but by making them into a single people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness.", GS, #32

[11] *Gaudium et Spes* says: “.....Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear.” GS #22

[12] GS #25

[13] GS#26

[14] GS#26

[15] Aristotle, *The Politics*, tr. and intr. Sinclair, T.A. Baltimore: Penguin, 1962 [1382b]

[16] Plato says that the highest form of the state and of the government is one in which the private and the individual is altogether banished from life. Human desires and fulfilment are subordinated to the needs of the state. Plato, *The Laws*, tr. Saunders, T.J. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970, Book V, [739-741]

[17] Aristotle, *The Politics*, [1266b-1276a]

[18] “...it lies in the power of a ruler to benefit every class in the State, and amongst the rest to promote to the utmost the interests of the poor; and this in virtue of his office, and without being open to suspicion of undue interference - since it is the province of the commonwealth to serve the common good. And the more that is done for the benefit of the working classes by the general laws of the country, the less need will there be to seek for special means to relieve them.” Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, #32

[19] “Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them.” Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, #79

[20] John XXIII, *Mater et Magister*, #20

[21] John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, London: CTS, 1963, #136-138

[22] GS, #49

[23] St. Basil, *Hom. Super Luc. Xii, 18*, quoted in Aquinas, Thomas *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q.32, Art.5

[24] Aquinas, St. Thomas *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q.66., Art.1

[25] GS, #69

[26] *In our times a special obligation binds us to make ourselves the neighbor of every person without exception. and of actively helping him when he comes across our path, whether he be an old person abandoned by all, a foreign laborer unjustly looked down upon, a refugee, a child born of an unlawful union and wrongly suffering for a sin he did not commit, or a hungry person who disturbs our conscience....” GS, #27*

[27] *Furthermore, whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia or wilful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself; whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary*

imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where men are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others of their like are infamies indeed. They poison human society, but they do more harm to those who practice them than those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are supreme dishonor to the Creator. GS, #27

[28] *Profound and rapid changes make it more necessary that no one ignoring the trend of events or drugged by laziness, content himself with a merely individualistic morality. It grows increasingly true that the obligations of justice and love are fulfilled only if each person, contributing to the common good, according to his own abilities and the needs of others, also promotes and assists the public and private institutions dedicated to bettering the conditions of human life. GS #30*

[29] One might immediately think here of the Howard government's notion of 'mutual obligation' which asserts that those without jobs have an obligation to work for the dole that they receive. It is a policy which is singularly at odds with the very powerfully worded message of Church documents and encyclicals since at least the time of Aquinas which assert that everyone has a right to share in the common good. Encouragement to accept one's civil responsibilities should be seen against this background. It is not because one has to somehow be grateful to be given what is one's by right that one accepts one's civic responsibilities, rather it is for one's own dignity as a human person that one is concerned with, for, by upholding one's own dignity, one contributes to the common good. Each person is encouraged to contribute because he or she has something worthwhile to contribute, not because one is compelled by a notion of mutual obligation.

[30] GS, #33

[31] John Paul II's target in this encyclical is as much underdevelopment in the Third World, as superdevelopment in the West. The mere accumulation of goods and services, even for the benefit of the majority, is not enough for the realisation of happiness. The excessive availability of material goods easily makes people slaves of "possession" and of immediate gratification. Blind consumerism results in a radical dissatisfaction because the more one possesses, the more one wants, while deeper aspirations remain unsatisfied or even stifled. See, for example, John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, #22.

[32] *"What does it profit a man that he gains the whole world if he loses his soul?" Lk 9:25*

[33] GS #41

[34] *"...[the Church] acknowledges and greatly esteems the dynamic movements of today by which these rights [human rights] are everywhere fostered." GS #41*

[35] GS, #42

[36] If ever there was a call to action, it is contained in Section 42, where it is strenuously proposed that there is no separation between one's public life and religious life. *This council exhorts Christians, as citizens of two cities, to strive to discharge their earthly duties conscientiously and in response the Gospel spirit. They are mistaken who, knowing that we have here no abiding city but seek one which is to come,(13) think that they may therefore shirk their earthly responsibilities. GS, #42.*

[37] Robert Manne comments in an essay that some time in the sixties Protestant-Catholic sectarianism vanished. One hopes this was because of the growth of an ecumenical spirit in the community rather than of an apathy about religious principles which has seen the relevance of the Christian churches gradually decline. I fear it is more likely the latter. See Manne, R. *The Barren Years*, Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2001, 204.

[\[38\]](#) *Different styles of life and multiple scales of values arise from the diverse manner of using things, of laboring, of expressing oneself, of practicing religion, of forming customs, of establishing laws and juridic institutions of cultivating the sciences, the arts and beauty. Thus the customs handed down to it form the patrimony proper to each human community. GS, #53*

[\[39\]](#) GS #55

[\[40\]](#) *Evangelium Vitae*, #4

[\[41\]](#) *Veritatis Splendor*, #4

[\[42\]](#) GS, #63

[\[43\]](#) Friedman, M. "The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits." *New York Times Magazine*, 13 September, 1970

[\[44\]](#) GS #63

[\[45\]](#) See, for example, *Rerum Novarum*, #48, *Quadragesimo Anno* #43 and #83; "Labor, as Our Predecessor explained well in his Encyclical, [\[48\]](#) is not a mere commodity. On the contrary, the worker's human dignity in it must be recognized." (QA, #83). See also *Laborem Excercens*, #14 and 15.

[\[46\]](#) GS, #65

[\[47\]](#) GS, #67

[\[48\]](#) GS, #67

[\[49\]](#) Recent reports suggest that many workers are expected to do at least 5 hours unpaid overtime a week.

[\[50\]](#) GS, #68

[\[51\]](#) Aristotle, *The Politics*, [1258a13-14]

[\[52\]](#) GS, #71

Dr. John Ozolins is at the present time based at St Patrick's Campus in Melbourne, He is the Head of School of Philosophy (National), the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University and a member of the University Research and Research Training Management Committee. His teaching and research interests include metaphysics and epistemology, applied ethics, the philosophy of education, the relationship between religion and science, and issues concerning the mind and personal identity. He is the editor of *Ethics Education*, an ethics newsletter for teachers of ethics and Editorial Consultant for *Filosofija Almanahs*, an occasional series of volumes in philosophy, published by the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, University of Latvia.