



VATICAN II

Celebrating 50 Years

**Pastoral Constitution on the
Church in the Modern World**
Gaudium et Spes

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Gaudium et Spes
Promulgated December 7, 1965

This session is about an hour in length and is designed to introduce the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. This presentation may be accompanied by PowerPoint slides and handouts, both provided.

Opening Prayer

**You are the One
from whom on different paths
all of us have come,
and to whom on different paths
all of us will return.
Make strong in our hearts what unites us;
build bridges across that which divides us.
Enable us to hear your voice, follow your will
and pursue your purpose,
and unite us in all we do to serve you. Amen.**

Introduction

Welcome to the last of our sessions on the documents of Vatican Council II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*. Fittingly, this document also was the last document to be approved by the council the day before it concluded with a vote of 2,307 to 75. It was officially promulgated by Pope Paul VI.

During the years of the council, the media around the world were concerned with the question: What does the Catholic Church have to say and to offer to the world for the modern and future eras of humanity?

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Of the 16 documents, we can say that *Gaudium et Spes* is a response to this question. It emerged as a suggestion directly from the floor of the Council rather than being prepared in advance as were the others, and it addresses the whole of humanity instead of a specific group.

It relied on the already approved tradition of Catholic Social Teaching, Scripture, Church Fathers, and the development of social doctrine. The Bishops attempted to address the present circumstances of the modern world in a very personal and pastoral way.

Constitution Sections

It is divided into two major parts. Part I has four chapters which address the nature of men and women and their vocation in the plan of God—a vocation that calls people to communion with one another.

The five chapters of Part II focus on urgent concerns facing humanity in the modern era.

It opens with the following message:

The joys and the hopes, the grief and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially of those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the grief and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts . . . United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every man. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest bonds. (1)

Overview of the Constitution

The document is an overview of the Catholic Church's teachings about humanity's relationship to society, especially in reference to economics, poverty, social justice, culture, science, technology and ecumenism. This document seeks to encourage people of good will everywhere to make human life on this planet more dignified—closer to God's plan for us.

Fifty years ago when the Second Vatican Council issued its *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, it had not been “pre-planned” as had the

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other major documents, especially the constitutions. It was given birth from the bishops' discussion on the council floor itself.

The opening words of the document give it its title: “The *joy and hope*, the grief and anxieties of the men of our time . . . (1)

The pastoral constitution presents a hope-filled vision of the human condition and an inspiring call to move forward on the path to realize this vision. It was, therefore, very appropriate that the first words of the constitution from which it gets its common Latin name is *Gaudium et Spes—Joy and Hope!*

Pope John's opening speech at the council had established the groundwork for this document. He called for optimism, the role of the Church in the world, the vision of the Church as the people of God, the inclusion of all people of good will and strong accommodations to the values of ecumenism.

This conciliar text laid out the most challenging vision of the Church's social mission of modern times. It called all the baptized to an adult faith, demanding that they take the initiative in bringing the Gospel into their homes, their workplace, their election booth. It recognized that the clergy can offer some spiritual guidance but that they will not have an answer to every pressing question.

Preface

The Preface to the document speaks of the solidarity of the Church with the whole human family. It is the first such document to address the whole world. In ordinary Christian vocabulary “the world” used to mean the ungodly world, the world of selfishness and pride. “The world” as now understood is humanity wounded by sin and yet redeemed by Jesus Christ. According to this understanding the world is good.

The Constitution assures us that God has been with all humanity from all time— from the beginning. It tells us that the one who does not acknowledge God is not thereby necessarily deprived of God's transforming mercy: “divine providence [does not] deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with his grace strive to live a good life.” (16)

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The Constitution attempts to describe in concrete terms what human life means to the Christian, how community with others is built, and how human activity is regarded.

Its goal is to carry forward the work of Christ under the lead of the Spirit. Christ entered the world to give witness to the truth, to rescue and not to sit in judgment, to serve and not to be served.

Gaudium et Spes sets out to examine the deep-seated changes which were taking place in the culture of the times. It looked at how rapid social change brought about changes in attitudes and morals and the place of religion in society. It looked at the changes and it reflected on how these changes often were linked with new desires and the on-going questionings of the men and women of the time.

The constitution challenges us, modern Christians to look at and trust the “signs of the times” and thereby attempt to understand the world in which we live. The Scriptural meaning of the expression, sign of the times, refers to the signs preceding the second coming. The conciliar text prefers to speak of the signs of God’s presence in history.

The Church must listen to discover the replies which God is now giving to these questions in history:

- What are the forces of healing and reconciliation at work in the world?
- Where is God building the kingdom?

We must dare to listen even when the solutions spell out God’s judgment on the Church.

This document challenged the church to help forge new bonds of global solidarity to alleviate the debts of the poorest countries and to become one of the world’s strongest advocates of multicultural approaches in international policies.

Because this document deals with such a wide range of issues, each needing far more time than we have available, we are only going to touch on some of the issues named in the document. It is the longest of the documents.

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To whom is the Constitution addressed?

The council addresses all people—those in the Church and all who call upon the name of Christ—as well as the whole of humanity.

Christians cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history. (27) The Catholic community should be deeply engaged in promoting the dignity of every person.

Why is it called “pastoral”?

The Constitution is called “pastoral” because, while based on doctrinal principles, it seeks to show the relation of the church to the world—to the people of today. *The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World* is extensive in its treatment of our responsibilities to humanity.

In Part I the Church develops her teaching on humankind, the world and the relationship of humankind to the world.

Part II treats at length the various aspects of life today and human society and in particular deals with those questions and problems which seem to have a greater urgency in our day. It takes into account the changing circumstances which the subject matter, by its very nature involves.

People today are troubled about current happenings, our place in the universe, and about our meaning and destiny. The Council intended to enter into conversations with the world on these different problems in the light of the Gospel message and offer humankind the resources which the church has received from the Holy Spirit. The church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is interested only in carrying on the life of Christ who came to save and not to judge, to serve and not to be served.

PART I

What is key to a deeper vision of its social role?

Gaudium et Spes saw dialogue with the secular world as a key source of the church’s development of a deeper vision of its social role. The Catholic community and its leaders must listen to the many voices speaking about the

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challenges we face, whether these voices come from Rome, from Washington, from the poor in our cities, in barrios or in refugee camps. We need to hear from Catholics and other Christians, from Jews, Muslims and Buddhists, and from those of no explicit faith at all as we seek to develop a more energetic response to challenges of justice and peace today.

The church needs to “step up this exchange” in order to formulate a more adequate Christian response to the needs of our world. The church needs to “contribute to the development of humankind on every level . . .” (44)

What is the core message of this Constitution?

At the core of this Constitution is the dignity of the human person. Appreciating the basic goodness of humanity, the Constitution addresses sin, the dignity of the intellect and moral conscience and the excellence of freedom. The human person is dignified but may still suffer.

Human “conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a person where he or she is alone with God.” But there is a mysterious aspect to human nature, and conscience is not easily discerned.

People live together in a community of persons for which there must be made available everything necessary for leading a truly human life. Every type of discrimination is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God’s intent. Science does not conflict with faith.

The Constitution addresses the mystery of death, the causes of atheism, the nature of marriage, and the proliferation of birth control, all of which are threats to human dignity. This doctrine is most relevant today!

Gaudium et Spes speaks prophetically when it says, “At all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel” (4)

“The Church has but one sole purpose—that the kingdom of God may come and the salvation of the human race be accomplished”. This is the heart of transmitting the faith.

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The Church lives and acts in the world. “Let there be no false opposition between professional and social activities on the one part, and religious life on the other.” It is not the “world against the Church.” It is “the world together with the Church”.

What is the situation of the world today?

The Church reads the “signs of the times” and interprets them in light of the Gospel in understandable language, as well as looking at questions about the meaning of this life and of the life to come, and how one is related to the other. The dignity of being human means being created in God’s image. (Chapter 1)

What are some important features of our modern world?

Social and cultural transformation creates a crisis of growth leading to insecurity:

- an abundance of wealth, resources and economical well-being and yet a huge proportion of the people of the world is plagued by hunger and illiteracy
- a sense of freedom, but new forms of slavery
- a feeling of mutual dependence, but opposing camps politically, economically, racially, ideologically with lack of community and war

We are looking for a better material world, without a parallel spiritual advancement. We find our truest self when we seek what is good not only for us, but for all. Each of us is responsible to fulfill the call to live justly and to walk in love always. God created us to be social, and we are bound together. (Chapter 2)

Deep-seated changes:

- development of science and mathematics and technology
- a greater self-awareness providing us with the technical means of molding the lives of whole people leading to control of the growth in population

These developments result in an immense series of new problems. Whatever is done to promote justice and dignity is infinitely more valuable than what is technologically created. The hope of the world rests in love. (Chapter 3)

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Changes in the social order:

- change in traditional community structures
- industrialization and urbanization on the increase
- mass media's contribution to the spread of knowledge
- extended immigration and emigration changing patterns of how we relate

Changes in attitude, morals, religion:

- values in question
- changing approaches to religion and spirituality

Imbalance in the world of today:

- headlong development of the world
- keener awareness of existing inequalities
- family tensions
- demands of conscience
- tension in social classes
- disagreement between international bodies

Broader aspiration of humankind:

- need to establish political, social and economic order at the service of people
- widening gap between rich and poor
- equality of women with men
- dignified life style
- cultural benefits

The world is capable of doing what is noble and brave.

Humankind's deeper questions:

- division in the world – reflection of division in humankind
- deeper questions being asked: who are we? meaning of suffering?
- contributions and expectations to/from society?
- end of life?

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The Church believes Christ can show us the way and that he is the center of history. The Church is the sign of the presence of God. The Church's greatest responsibility and challenge is to promote and attain unity. (Chapter 4)

Beneath the changes there is also much unchanged that has its ultimate foundation in Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Part II

There are five priorities of concern in Part II: Marriage and family, human culture, social-political and economic life, bonds among nations, war and peace.

A key concept found throughout Part II of *Gaudium et Spes* is that of neighbor.

The world is made up of communities of humankind, in which we are all members of the one family. To that end, each of us has a responsibility for the other—our neighbor; considering the other as we do ourselves.

The Dignity of Marriage and Family (Chapter 1)

Marriage promotes a healthy human society. Sacramental married life is a covenantal relationship of man and woman created by God. All Sacraments are a sign of God's faithful love and are sources of grace. The Church rejects the taking of any life.

Proper Development of Culture: (Chapter 2)

Culture implies community living. How do we separate ourselves from aspects of culture that do not lead to God and promote humanism? The Church will never be bound to culture or any period of history. If culture is to be of value, it must provide people freedom to search for truth, to speak out, and to openly express beliefs. The writers consider evil any behavior that opposes life—including abortion, euthanasia, prostitution, human trafficking and deplorable work conditions.

The Constitution recognized a more full participation in the culture of life due to changes in education and technology. Education, technology and scientific advancement should be used to promote life and the common good. Its authors hoped that cultural activities would be used to understand and build faith

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Economic and Social Life: (Chapter 3)

There is more than enough available to the world to provide for the needs of humanity. A just world seeks to provide opportunity for all to grow intellectually and morally. The act of work is a greater value to a human being than to seek material wealth. Workers should have the ability to support themselves and their family. Work is how we serve one another. There should be incentive in place for one to have private ownership and private control over possessions.

Because of our relationship, God calls each person to serve every other who crosses his or her path and needs assistance. These individuals may include the elderly, an immigrant, a single mother, a person who is hungry.

Principles of Catholic Social Teaching

Though not specifically labeled as such, *Gaudium et Spes* lays out the seven principles of Catholic Social Teaching:

- Life and dignity of the human person: all human life is sacred
- Call to Family, Community and Participation: societal organization affects human dignity
- Rights and Responsibilities: corresponding to rights are duties and responsibilities
- Option for the Poor and Vulnerable: their needs are to be put first (Mt. 25:31-46)
- The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers: right to productive work, decent and fair wages, to organize and join unions, to private property and to economic initiative
- Solidarity: loving our neighbor has global dimensions
- Care of the environment: a responsibility of our faith

The Council expected that the world economy would grow and change. They asked that all individuals and families be able to participate in the use of the goods of the world. The Council noted the blessings of the Earth and required good stewardship as a response to this gift.

The Political Community (Chapter 4)

In 1965 the council called for a respectful dialogue of issues on which the Church disagrees with others. Love and understanding do not suggest we do not speak

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the truth. Rather, they promote and provide the courage for doing so. Knowing and speaking the truth must always focus on the error in thinking or behaving, and leave the judgment of a person to God.

Authority is required in society in order to prevent people from persecuting others. Authority must function as a moral force and not as a tyranny. Government exists for the sake of the people. People should always have a voice in choosing who represents them, and it is the duty of citizens to actively vote for their leaders. Citizens should be loyal to their country, but not at the expense of becoming blind to the needs of people in the world. The truest duty politically is to oppose injustice, oppression, and intolerance. Church and government are rightly independent and self-governing. The work of the Church is to preach the faith and teach social doctrines. The Church has the right and responsibility to pass moral judgments on society when the good of souls is at stake.

Fostering Peace (Chapter 5)

Peace is not the absence of war. True peace is of God. Peace is directly relevant to people's ability to love. Peace will never be obtained unless people can trust and share. Peace requires sincere respect for others and an effort to see that the basic human needs of others are met. Peace flows from Christ.

Governments have a legitimate right to defend themselves. They have a duty to protect their citizens. No nation is free to choose to wage war for gain in any way. Blind obedience to a nation is never an excuse to destroy populated areas. The destruction of inhabited areas of people is a crime against God and humanity. Peace is not possible where these exist: injustice, economic inequality, thirst for power, or disregard for human life. The escalating population in the world is a serious concern and should be addressed. The solution to this problem must agree with moral law.

Conclusion

The closing passages of the Constitution deal with the great need for unity of vision and cooperation. The Council fathers note that their teaching is addressed both to believers and to non-believers since they are dealing with questions that relate to our full destiny and dignity.

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In entering into dialogue with the world, “the Church shows herself as a sign of that spiritual brotherhood by which sincere dialogue is not only made possible but also strengthened.” (92)

Pope John XXIII spoke of the work of the Council as achieving a new level of “self-consciousness” for the Church as a whole. The bishops saw in this Constitution a vision of the Church as a sign, witness and sacrament. Above all it is a vision of the Church as servant.

In his remarks at the closing ceremony of the Council on December 7, 1965, Pope Paul VI said that in the Constitution “the idea of service has been central”.

Timeliness of *Gaudium et Spes* today

Gaudium et Spes is as timely in 2013 as it was in 1965. The authors address modern culture and its dangers as well as the potential for its ability to enhance our faith. They recognize the difference in individual gifts and call for a sharing and serving according to one’s gifts and others’ needs. They admit that individuals make errors in judgment, and ask that we correct the error while not judging the person.

Anticipating advancements in technology and education as well as a changing environment, they determined that all should share in these blessings and use them for life-giving purposes.

Gaudium et Spes represents what many think is the most profound change from being a church in conflict with the world to being a church seeking to make a contribution to the world. It demonstrated a new consciousness in the church.

Theologian Hans Kung has commented that the church at the Council and in this document show the church in a new light. It was a church in the direction of progress and serious renewal, a church no longer fearful of dialogue. And, like John XXIII, *Gaudium et Spes* addressed itself to the whole of humanity with a desire to engage in genuine dialogue. If the church is to make a real contribution to the world, it will have to understand that world.

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Implementation

Bill Huebsch has written extensively on Vatican II, where he directs his work toward use in parishes. In “How to Teach about Vatican II” he wrote:

“In the years since the Council ended, we have seen both an enthusiastic embrace of the spirit of Vatican II as well as resistance to its teachings. We’ve seen a Church at home in the modern world, as well as a Church more frightened of the modern times. We’ve seen hundreds of thousands of Catholics step forward, united by their common baptisms, to redefine themselves as Church, “the People of God”, and take up key roles in ministry and leadership. We’ve seen a new generation of young Catholics emerge in these last years who know little or nothing of life in the Church before the Council—and who may not fully understand what happened in Rome during those heady days of Vatican II.”

Today only 10% of Catholics remain who were part of the pre-Vatican II generation, those born in or before 1940. About 33 percent of Catholics are from the Vatican II generation itself, born between 1941-1960. Fifty-seven percent of adult Catholics are now from the post-Vatican II generation, born since 1961.

We have today to face the challenge of ensuring that we prepare a new generation of Christians who can with competence and idealism be truly at the heart of political culture and social commitment, alongside persons of different viewpoints, but fully inspired by their Christian vision. Looking to the future, we have to remind ourselves that, while respecting the role of politics in the broad sense, the Church has its own responsibilities to ensure the contribution of believers to the building of a strong and cohesive values-oriented society.

Closing Prayer

Leader Gracious and Holy God, we join together in prayer for all who seek to promote the vision and spirit of Vatican II anywhere. May we be anointed by your Spirit to share in divine creativity in solving the challenges of carrying out Vatican II’s empowerment of the baptized.

Response: Send forth your Spirit!

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L. May we benefit from the diversity of gifts you have bestowed on all your people and work toward recognizing and using those gifts fully.

R. Send forth your Spirit!

L. May we be open to your grace and steadfast in your love.

R. Send forth your Spirit!

L. May we always remember all those who have gone before us, both blazing prophets and quiet souls, who have labored for freedom, truth and dignity for all people.

R. Send forth your Spirit!

L. May we be strengthened by the solidarity of this communal prayer to remember that in the grace and power of the God who binds us all together we can do more as one than any of us alone.

R. Send forth your Spirit! Amen!