

*IN CELEBRATION OF THE YEAR OF FAITH
October 11, 2012 – November 24, 2013*

*AT THE CATHEDRAL PARISH OF SAINT RAPHAEL
in Madison, Wisconsin*

This Year of Faith occurs on the fiftieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council. The Year of Faith commemorates that Council, and comes with an invitation to revisit the documents produced by Vatican II so we may better understand the authentic teaching of that Council and put it into practice.

PASTORAL CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD (*GAUDIUM ET SPES*)

1. Title

We have seen the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church – *Lumen Gentium*. This is the Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church and her message for our time.

Gaudium et Spes is published at the end of the last session of the Council, and in some sense its culmination.

First, we had to be clear about what the Church is and believes; then we are ready to announce her message to the world.

Gaudium et Spes = “joy and hope”

The Pastoral Constitution begins:

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. (GS 1)

In Pope Benedict, we had the great analyst of the Council;
In Pope Francis, we have the personification of this “crowning document.”
Don't these words express the spirit of our new Holy Father?

Gaudium et Spes does not exclusively treat theological or ecclesiastical subjects, but matters that are of interest to all people.

And as those opening words suggest, the spirit of the document is one of solidarity with all people. We might be reminded of the words of the Gospel:

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. (Jn 3:17)

2. The Problem and the answer

a. The Introduction of *Gaudium et Spes* is largely devoted to making the case that the world needs to be saved – not making a theological argument, but citing our common human experience.

We experience great technical progress accompanied by a crisis of meaning.

Though mankind is stricken with wonder at its own discoveries and its power, it often raises anxious questions about the current trend of the world, about the place and role of man in the universe, about the meaning of its individual and collective strivings, and about the ultimate destiny of reality and of humanity. (GS 3)

Many concrete examples of practical problems are offered:

Abundance of wealth for some,
in the midst of poverty and illiteracy for many;
Exaltation of freedom,
with new forms of social and psychological slavery;
Ideal of human unity,
but hostility between rival ideological camps.

And then underlying, philosophical problems are described:

Scientific methodology and accompanying technology rule,
with the effect of fragmentation of knowledge
and to the neglect of moral goods;

This problem has become ever more obvious in the modern university. The ideal of forming a “Renaissance person” has been abandoned. Scientific departments are technically excellent but narrowly focused; the humanities are highly politicized and morally bankrupt. No one supposes that the university graduate comes out as one formed in the best of achievements of our civilization.

“Globalization” (described in *Gaudium et Spes* before it had a name),
to the detriment of traditional communities;

The destiny of the human community has become all of a piece, where once the various groups of men had a kind of private history of their own. . . By this very circumstance, the traditional local communities such as families, clans, tribes, villages, various groups and associations stemming from social contacts, experience more thorough changes every day. (GS 5,6)

Industrialization and urbanization,
to the detriment of social structure and stability;

This happened in the United States 100 years ago. It is happening now at a ferocious rate in China. Young people are drawn to new industrial cities, where they sometimes live in barracks, with little in their lives but work. They are cut off from family, culture, and tradition – the things that give meaning to life.

Alienation of the young,
manifest in questioning and impatience for influence.

b. The response of the Church is given in the body of *Gaudium et Spes*, which is divided into two parts:

Part I: the basic principles that guide Christians as we think about our contemporary situation and questions of the day.

Part II (in five chapters): particular issues – marriage and family; culture; economic and social life; the political community; the international community and peace.

The Church is not an expert on all these matters in a technical sense (marriage and family excepted), but is an “expert in humanity” (as Pope Paul VI said) – understanding the full truth about the human person: our dignity, our social nature, our capacity to know and love God, and our fulfillment in love. Everything the Church says about particular topics is said in light of these truths.

Our ability to approach questions in this way is a great strength of our Catholic tradition.

In this country, we observe that Evangelical Christians often share our moral convictions, but their rationale for those positions is based on Sacred Scripture (which is entirely legitimate within the community of believers, but not so useful to those who do not share the Faith), and they find it difficult to address questions that are not mentioned in Scripture.

So in the last generation or so, when morally traditional American presidents appoint new justices to the Supreme Court, they almost always

choose Catholics – who have the tradition of looking at these questions with an anthropology (understanding of the human person) and the tools of reason.

In Part I of *Gaudium et Spes*, two great themes are treated:

- (1) the human condition and
- (2) the Church and the world.

One homily will be devoted to each of those central themes.

GAUDIUM ET SPES I – THE HUMAN CONDITION

A. Starting Point

1. Order

Gaudium et Spes departs from the traditional order of theology.

The traditional order of Catholic theology is “deductive”:

It begins with God (in order of “the processions”: Father-Son-Holy Spirit), then moves to the Church, then the Sacraments celebrated in the Church, then the life of the believer lived in the grace of those Sacraments.

This progression follows the order of the Creed;
it is the traditional order of catechisms;
it is also the order of *Lumen Gentium*.

The ordering of *Gaudium et Spes* is different.
It begins with the human person.

Hence the focal point of our total presentation will be man himself, whole and entire, body and soul, heart and conscience, mind and will. (GS 3)

This not a betrayal of the Catholic tradition –
evidence that we are accepting the attitude of atheistic humanism, e.g.

Gaudium et Spes uses a different ordering because it is a different kind of document – not an “in house” exposition of theology for believers, but a document addressed to the world.

Hence this Second Vatican Council, having probed more profoundly into the mystery of the Church, now addresses itself without hesitation, not only to the sons of the Church and to all who invoke the name of Christ, but to the whole of humanity. (GS 2)

Hence under the light of Christ, the image of the unseen God, the firstborn of every creature, the council wishes to speak to all men in order to shed light on the mystery of man and to cooperate in finding the solution to the outstanding problems of our time. (GS 10)

2. Social Ethics

In taking the human person as its starting point, *Gaudium et Spes* is exemplifying a fundamental principle of Catholic social ethics – one which is perhaps first enunciated in this document:

All human institutions must begin (as to their design) and end (as to their goal) with the human person.

For the beginning, the subject and the goal of all social institutions is and must be the human person which for its part and by its very nature stands completely in need of social life. (GS 25)

This is echoed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (#1881); and it was a frequent theme in the teaching of Pope John Paul II.

The social concern of the Church, directed towards an authentic development of man and society which would respect and promote all the dimensions of the human person, has always expressed itself in the most varied ways. . . . Development which is not only economic must be measured and oriented according to the reality and vocation of man seen in his totality, namely, according to his interior dimension. (Sollicitudo Rei Socialis 1, 29)

Why is this important?

This is the “antidote” to ideology – “ideology” being the service of a theory or ideal even if that is catastrophic to real human persons.

Pope John Paul II, who had lived under the two great ideological totalitarianisms of the 20th century (Nazism and Communism), was especially sensitive to this problem. Both those systems were willing to sacrifice millions of persons for the sake of “the cause” (the purity and homeland of the master race [Nazis], or a classless society [Communists]).

To the contrary, Catholic social thought insists that each social project must begin with an adequate understanding of the human person (including the centrality of the family, which is the first social institution), and must result in the authentic good of the persons touched by that project.

Totalitarianism is a gross violation of this principle; the system of public education in our country would also be found wanting.

B. Fundamental Aspects of the Human Person

1. Dignity (used in the title of *GS* Chapter 1)

The importance of the human race is a commonly held conviction (though less so now than in 1965 – cf. the notion of some radical environmentalists who do not concede any primacy to the human race).

According to the almost unanimous opinion of believers and unbelievers alike, all things on earth should be related to man as their center and crown. (GS 12)

The Church entirely affirms this conviction, justifying it in light of our creation in the image of God.

The recognition of God does not diminish the dignity of man (as atheism would allege) nor does it lead us to ignore human well-being in this world (the “opiate of the masses” charge).

The Church holds that the recognition of God is in no way hostile to man's dignity, since this dignity is rooted and perfected in God. For man was made an intelligent and free member of society by God Who created him, but even more important, he is called as a son to commune with God and share in His happiness. She further teaches that a hope related to the end of time does not diminish the importance of intervening duties but rather undergirds the acquittal of them with fresh incentives. By contrast, when a divine instruction and the hope of life eternal are wanting, man's dignity is most grievously lacerated, as current events often attest; riddles of life and death, of guilt and of grief go unsolved with the frequent result that men succumb to despair. (GS 21)

The Faith also teaches us that man is fallen. Far from being a “fairy tale” created to control people through the creation of guilt, this doctrine is in perfect accord with human experience.

Therefore man is split within himself. As a result, all of human life, whether individual or collective, shows itself to be a dramatic struggle between good and evil, between light and darkness. Indeed, man finds that by himself he is incapable of battling the assaults of evil successfully, so that everyone feels as though he is bound by chains . . . For sin has diminished man, blocking his path to fulfillment. The call to grandeur and the depths of misery, both of which are a part of human experience, find their ultimate and simultaneous explanation in the light of this revelation. (GS 13)

2. Freedom (and truth)

The modern world has a great devotion to freedom, but its understanding of freedom is very deficient.

Our contemporaries make much of this freedom and pursue it eagerly; and rightly to be sure. Often however they foster it perversely as a license for doing whatever pleases them, even if it is evil. (GS 17)

The Christian perspective has a full appreciation for human freedom, but relates it to the requirements of truth.

[A]uthentic freedom is an exceptional sign of the divine image within man. For God has willed that man remain "under the control of his own decisions," so that he can seek his Creator spontaneously, and come freely to utter and blissful perfection through loyalty to Him. Hence man's dignity demands that he act according to a knowing and free choice that is personally motivated and prompted from within, not under blind internal impulse nor by mere external pressure. Man achieves such dignity when, emancipating himself from all captivity to passion, he pursues his goal in a spontaneous choice of what is good, and procures for himself through effective and skilful action, apt helps to that end. Since man's freedom has been damaged by sin, only by the aid of God's grace can he bring such a relationship with God into full flower. (GS 17)

This conviction is vindicated by the experience of conscience, which is universal.

In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to his heart: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged. (GS 16)

3. Social Nature

It is commonly observed that man is a social being, and the development of the modern world has witnessed increased interdependence. Yet the human dimension of relationship is not well served by contemporary life.

One of the salient features of the modern world is the growing interdependence of men one on the other, a development promoted chiefly by modern technical advances. (GS 23)

The Church understands that the human person is created for communion, and this is experienced in the first place, in the most comprehensive and intimate experience of communion – marriage.

But God did not create man as a solitary, for from the beginning "male and female he created them." Their companionship produces the primary form of interpersonal communion. For by his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential. (GS 23)

We were also created for communion with God, and we will never live in full accord with the truth unless and until we enjoy that relationship

The root reason for human dignity lies in man's call to communion with God. From the very circumstance of his origin man is already invited to converse with God. For man would not exist were he not created by God's love and constantly preserved by it; and he cannot live fully according to truth unless he freely acknowledges that love and devotes himself to His Creator. (GS 19)

This was the insight so compellingly expressed by St. Augustine after his long search for truth.

Far from diminishing man, her message brings to his development light, life and freedom. Apart from this message nothing will avail to fill up the heart of man: "Thou hast made us for Thyself," O Lord, "and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee." (GS 21)