

The Problem

Gaudium et Spes was published in 1965, and addresses the mood of that moment in history. It characterizes that time as one of great optimism at human achievement and a promising future, mixed with anxiety over certain serious ambiguities: poverty, “the rat race” (“new forms of social and psychological slavery”) and “the Cold War” (“hostility between ideological camps”).

Based on what you know or remember about the 1960’s, do you find this an accurate description of that era? What do you remember of the optimism of that time? What do you remember of the “anxiety” of that time?

If *Gaudium et Spes* were being written today, how do you think the general mood of the 21st century would be described? Would there be more “optimism” or more “anxiety,” relative to the 1960’s?

The Human Condition

Gaudium et Spes identifies one of the great values of the contemporary world as freedom. It says that the Church entirely shares this value, but with the understanding that freedom is not simply the license to do as we like. The Catholic position is that freedom must be related to truth.

This is a critically important point, and one that our contemporaries do not easily appreciate.

In the first place, they might not believe that the Catholic Church is in favor of free will. What objections might an adversary offer, and how would you respond?

And an even bigger problem: many people *do* think that freedom means the license to do as my appetites urge. What argument would you make that a life of license is *not* a life of freedom?

The Church and the World

The relationship between the ultimate “other-worldly” goal of the Church and her engagement in the affairs of this world is a classic question.

The “poor answers” to this question are (1) any interest in the problems of this world is a betrayal of the Church’s supernatural mission, or (alternatively) (2) the essential mission of the Church is social work. Have you seen those “poor answers” at work in attitudes you have encountered?

What is the heart of the answer to this classic question offered by *Gaudium et Spes*? (See *GS II,A,4.*) Do you find this a helpful/satisfying answer? How have you seen this “answer” lived in real experience?