

*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*)**

***GAUDIUM ET SPES* II – THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD**

**A note on the meaning of “the world.”**

Even in Sacred Scripture, “the world” is used in two senses:

- (1) the natural order created by God and the persons in it  
*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 forces of evil  
“The world, the flesh and the devil.”

In *Gaudium et Spes*, “the world” is used in the first positive/neural sense. The Christian has solicitude for the world (in this sense), without being “of the world.” The second, negative meaning of “the world” is briefly acknowledged.

*That is why Christ's Church, trusting in the design of the Creator, acknowledges that human progress can serve man's true happiness, yet she cannot help echoing the Apostle's warning: "Be not conformed to this world." (Rom. 12:2) Here by the world is meant that spirit of vanity and malice which transforms into an instrument of sin those human energies intended for the service of God and man. (GS 37)*

## A. The attitude of the Church toward human activity and progress

Since at least the trial of Galileo (1633) and peaking at the time of the French Revolution (1789), there had been the sense that the Church was the enemy of progress. (Once the great engine of social change and human progress, she had become “the Establishment” – the defender of the status quo.)

In response to this attitude, *Gaudium et Spes* makes some distinctions to clarify the Church’s attitude toward human activity and human progress.

### 1. The human and the divine are not in competition.

Some may think that man’s ability to “take care of himself” is seen by the Church as a threat to religious faith.

*[M]any benefits once looked for, especially from heavenly powers, man has now enterprisingly procured for himself. (GS 33)*

This is the position: “The Church doesn’t want medical progress, because they want people to come to the priests to pray for protection against the plague.”

*Gaudium et Spes* says that this is a false problem. Christianity has always held that God has given the world to man to cultivate and develop.

*Throughout the course of the centuries, men have labored to better the circumstances of their lives through a monumental amount of individual and collective effort. To believers, this point is settled: considered in itself, this human activity accords with God's will. For man, created to God's image, received a mandate to subject to himself the earth and all it contains, and to govern the world with justice and holiness; a mandate to relate himself and the totality of things to Him Who was to be acknowledged as the Lord and Creator of all. Thus, by the subjection of all things to man, the name of God would be wonderful in all the earth. (GS 34)*

Human progress is valued by believers not just because it produces greater material abundance, but because the abilities and skills of the human person are further developed.

*[W]hen a man works he not only alters things and society, he develops himself as well. He learns much, he cultivates his resources, he goes outside of himself and beyond himself. Rightly understood this kind of growth is of greater value than any external riches which can be garnered. A man is more precious for what he is than for what he has. (GS 35)*

The value of development applies not only to great innovation, but to the fruit of daily human work.

*This mandate concerns the whole of everyday activity as well. For while providing the substance of life for themselves and their families, men and women are performing their activities in a way which appropriately benefits society. They can justly consider that by their labor they are unfolding the Creator's work, consulting the advantages of their brother men, and are contributing by their personal industry to the realization in history of the divine plan. (GS 34)*

2. The faith affords the things of this world an appropriate autonomy.

a. Autonomy

According to the design of the Creator, natural things operate according to their own laws.

*Now many of our contemporaries seem to fear that a closer bond between human activity and religion will work against the independence of men, of societies, or of the sciences.*

*If by the autonomy of earthly affairs we mean that created things and societies themselves enjoy their own laws and values which must be gradually deciphered, put to use, and regulated by men, then it is entirely right to demand that autonomy. Such is not merely required by modern man, but harmonizes also with the will of the Creator. For by the very circumstance of their having been created, all things are endowed with their own stability, truth, goodness, proper laws and order. Man must respect these as he isolates them by the appropriate methods of the individual sciences or arts. (GS 36)*

The coherence of the created order allows systematic inquiry and understanding. Good science – carried on with objectivity and in accord with moral norms – is not in conflict with religion.

Some scientific inquiry is problematic – for example, current research using embryonic stem cells is flawed, both because it violates moral norms (using aborted children as a resource) and because it is pursued even though the use of morally unproblematic adult stem cells has been much more successful.

*Therefore if methodical investigation within every branch of learning is carried out in a genuinely scientific manner and in accord with moral norms, it never truly conflicts with faith, for*

*earthly matters and the concerns of faith derive from the same God. Indeed whoever labors to penetrate the secrets of reality with a humble and steady mind, even though he is unaware of the fact, is nevertheless being led by the hand of God, who holds all things in existence, and gives them their identity. Consequently, we cannot but deplore certain habits of mind, which are sometimes found too among Christians, which do not sufficiently attend to the rightful independence of science and which, from the arguments and controversies they spark, lead many minds to conclude that faith and science are mutually opposed. (GS 36)*

## b. Relationship

The meaning of this world and human destiny can only be understood adequately in relation to God.

*But if the expression, the independence of temporal affairs, is taken to mean that created things do not depend on God, and that man can use them without any reference to their Creator, anyone who acknowledges God will see how false such a meaning is. For without the Creator the creature would disappear. For their part, however, all believers of whatever religion always hear His revealing voice in the discourse of creatures. When God is forgotten, however, the creature itself grows unintelligible. (ibid)*

There cannot be so much “autonomy” that things are seen in isolation or opposition to the will of our provident Creator. This is what has happened in regard to marriage in our culture – having lost sight of the Creator, we find ourselves unable to live marriage successfully and are in danger of forgetting even what it is.

## 3. Pride and selfishness disfigure human progress

*Gaudium et Spes* shows itself to be more optimistic about human moral progress than some unbelievers. Some context is helpful to appreciate the spirit of *Gaudium et Spes*.

The nineteenth century had exhibited a rather naïve belief in human progress – “every day in every way, we are getting better and better.” This delusion had died in the trenches of World War I. The modern nation states of Europe squandered a generation for nothing. The “Great War” made it evident that technological progress was not always accompanied by moral progress.

The response of Europe was first a cynical and decadent culture (the café society of the Weimar Republic), against which Fascism arose as a backlash (offering strident nationalism as “something to believe in”).

In *Gaudium et Spes*, the Church becomes again the champion of progress according to humanitarian ideals, but does so acknowledging the ambiguity caused by the fallen-ness of human nature.

Sacred Scripture and human experience both attest that we do achieve real progress in the world, but that it is always threatened by corruption through selfishness.

*Sacred Scripture teaches the human family what the experience of the ages confirms: that while human progress is a great advantage to man, it brings with it a strong temptation. For . . . individuals and groups pay heed solely to their own interests, and not to those of others. Thus it happens that the world ceases to be a place of true brotherhood. (GS 37)*

This is the root of the battle between good and evil that can be traced throughout human history.

*For a monumental struggle against the powers of darkness pervades the whole history of man. The battle was joined from the very origins of the world and will continue until the last day, as the Lord has attested. Caught in this conflict, man is obliged to wrestle constantly if he is to cling to what is good, nor can he achieve his own integrity without great efforts and the help of God's grace. (ibid)*

Only in the cross and Resurrection is our attitude to created things purified and perfected so that we receive the things of this world with gratitude, appreciate them, and use them with detachment for the common good.

*Hence if anyone wants to know how this unhappy situation can be overcome, Christians will tell him that all human activity, constantly imperiled by man's pride and deranged self-love, must be purified and perfected by the power of Christ's cross and resurrection. For redeemed by Christ and made a new creature in the Holy Spirit, man is able to love the things themselves created by God, and ought to do so. He can receive them from God and respect and reverence them as flowing constantly from the hand of God. Grateful to his Benefactor for these creatures, using and enjoying them in detachment and liberty of spirit, man is led forward into a true possession of them, as having nothing, yet possessing all things. "All are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's." (ibid)*

#### 4. Human progress and the Kingdom of God

We await new heavens and new earth – as we heard in the second reading of this Fifth Sunday of Easter.

*We do not know the time for the consummation of the earth and of humanity, nor do we know how all things will be transformed. As deformed by sin, the shape of this world will pass away; but we are taught that God is preparing a new dwelling place and a new earth where justice will abide, and whose blessedness will answer and surpass all the longings for peace which spring up in the human heart. (GS 39)*

This does not cause us to ignore the problems of this world. Christians are both members of the Kingdom of God and citizens of the world. Precisely by living the wisdom of the Faith and the Christian virtues (in our personal lives, in family life, in our profession or trade, and as citizens), we do great good for the world.

Thereby, the Church “*serves as a leaven and as a kind of soul for human society*” . . . *the Church does not only communicate divine life to men but in some way casts the reflected light of that life over the entire earth . . . (GS 40)*

*This council exhorts Christians, as citizens of two cities, to strive to discharge their earthly duties conscientiously and in response to the Gospel spirit. They are mistaken who, knowing that we have here no abiding city but seek one which is to come, think that they may therefore shirk their earthly responsibilities. For they are forgetting that by the faith itself they are more obliged than ever to measure up to these duties, each according to his proper vocation. Nor, on the contrary, are they any less wide of the mark who think that religion consists in acts of worship alone and in the discharge of certain moral obligations, and who imagine they can plunge themselves into earthly affairs in such a way as to imply that these are altogether divorced from the religious life. This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age. (GS 43)*

The Kingdom of God cannot be confused with human progress; and it is not something that man can achieve.

*Hence, while earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ's kingdom, to the extent that the former can contribute to the better ordering of human society, it is of vital concern to the Kingdom of God. (GS 39)*

## **C. Benefits the Church offers the world**

While the Church shares many values that are widely held in the modern world, the knowledge of the Faith and the help of the Holy Spirit allow the Church to make a distinctive contribution.

*Motivated by this faith, it labors to decipher authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the happenings, needs and desires in which this People has a part along with other men of our age. For faith throws a new light on everything, manifests God's design for man's total vocation, and thus directs the mind to solutions which are fully human. (GS 11)*

### **1. The good the Church does for the world**

a. Even though the Church has an eschatological purpose, She experiences the reality of our present existence with others in the world. Reflecting the glory of the divine life she has received to people everywhere, She is a leaven and soul for the world.

*[T]he Church has a saving and an eschatological purpose which can be fully attained only in the future world. But she is already present in this world, and is composed of men, that is, of members of the earthly city who have a call to form the family of God's children during the present history of the human race, and to keep increasing it until the Lord returns. . . . Thus the Church . . . goes forward together with humanity and experiences the same earthly lot which the world does. She serves as a leaven and as a kind of soul for human society as it is to be renewed in Christ and transformed into God's family.*

*Pursuing the saving purpose which is proper to her, the Church does not only communicate divine life to men but in some way casts the reflected light of that life over the entire earth, most of all by its healing and elevating impact on the dignity of the person, by the way in which it strengthens the seams of human society and imbues the everyday activity of men with a deeper meaning and importance. (GS 40)*

b. The Gospel reveals man to himself

*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)*

*What needs to be recommended for the upbuilding of contemporary society?  
What is the ultimate significance of human activity throughout the world?  
People are waiting for an answer to these questions. (GS 11)*

The Church knows that our questions can only be answered and our longings satisfied by God.

*The Church truly knows that only God, Whom she serves, meets the deepest longings of the human heart, which is never fully satisfied by what this world has to offer. (GS 41)*

God our Father and Creator answers our questions about ourselves through the Incarnation. The Divine Person of His Son, who has come as one like us, shows us what human life is meant to be. The Lord shows us and equips us to attain the perfection of our human nature.

*[O]nly God, Who created man to His own image and ransomed him from sin, provides the most adequate answer to the questions, and this He does through what He has revealed in Christ His Son, Who became man. Whoever follows after Christ, the perfect man, becomes himself more of a man. For by His incarnation the Father's Word assumed, and sanctified through His cross and resurrection, the whole of man, body and soul, and through that totality the whole of nature created by God for man's use. (ibid)*

Very importantly, the truth of the Gospel is the surest ground for the safeguarding of human dignity. Absent the Gospel, some would undervalue human body; others would make the opposite error of worshipping it.

*Thanks to this belief, the Church can anchor the dignity of human nature against all tides of opinion, for example those which undervalue the human body or idolize it. By no human law can the personal dignity and liberty of man be so aptly safeguarded as by the Gospel of Christ which has been entrusted to the Church. (ibid)*

The Gospel champions:

human freedom – against the slavery of sin  
the dignity of conscience  
the development of human talents – to glorify God and serve others  
charity toward all.

*For this Gospel announces and proclaims the freedom of the sons of God, and repudiates all the bondage which ultimately results from sin; it has a sacred reverence for the dignity of conscience and its freedom of choice,*

*constantly advises that all human talents be employed in God's service and men's, and, finally, commends all to the charity of all. (ibid)*

The Church is in favor of modern movements that extol and extend human rights, but is concerned that these be formed by the spirit of the Gospel. To pursue human rights contrary to Divine Law is not to serve the dignity of the human person but to open the way for its annihilation.

*The Church, therefore, by virtue of the Gospel committed to her, proclaims the rights of man; she acknowledges and greatly esteems the dynamic movements of today by which these rights are everywhere fostered. Yet these movements must be penetrated by the spirit of the Gospel and protected against any kind of false autonomy. For we are tempted to think that our personal rights are fully ensured only when we are exempt from every requirement of divine law. But this way lies not the maintenance of the dignity of the human person, but its annihilation. (ibid)*

### c. Unity

The solidarity of Christians among ourselves is a precursor of the human unity that both Christian and secular thought see as a goal.

*The union of the human family is greatly fortified and fulfilled by the unity, founded on Christ, of the family of God's sons.*

*Christ, to be sure, gave His Church no proper mission in the political, economic or social order. The purpose which He set before her is a religious one. But out of this religious mission itself come a function, a light and an energy which can serve to structure and consolidate the human community according to the divine law. As a matter of fact, when circumstances of time and place produce the need, she can and indeed should initiate activities on behalf of all men, especially those designed for the needy, such as the works of mercy and similar undertakings.*

*The Church recognizes that worthy elements are found in today's social movements, especially an evolution toward unity, a process of wholesome socialization and of association in civic and economic realms. The promotion of unity belongs to the innermost nature of the Church, for she is, "thanks to her relationship with Christ, a sacramental sign and an instrument of intimate union with God, and of the unity of the whole human race." Thus she shows the world that an authentic union, social and external, results from a union of minds and hearts, namely from that faith and charity by which her own unity is unbreakably rooted in the Holy Spirit. For the force which the Church can inject into the modern society of man consists in that faith and charity put into vital practice, not in any external dominion exercised by merely human means. (GS 42)*

The Church, wedded to no particular social system, can mediate relations among various peoples.

*Moreover, since in virtue of her mission and nature she is bound to no particular form of human culture, nor to any political, economic or social system, the Church by her very universality can be a very close bond between diverse human communities and nations, provided these trust her and truly acknowledge her right to true freedom in fulfilling her mission. (ibid)*

## 2. Modesty

While insisting on the benefits the Church offers to the world, *Gaudium et Spes* is modest in describing the describing the limitations of what the Church can do in the practical realm, and in recognizing that “benefits” are “not a one-way streets.”

### a. Sin disfigures the efforts of the Church

*Although by the power of the Holy Spirit the Church will remain the faithful spouse of her Lord and will never cease to be the sign of salvation on earth, still she is very well aware that among her members, both clerical and lay, some have been unfaithful to the Spirit of God during the course of many centuries; in the present age, too, it does not escape the Church how great a distance lies between the message she offers and the human failings of those to whom the Gospel is entrusted. Whatever be the judgment of history on these defects, we ought to be conscious of them, and struggle against them energetically, lest they inflict harm on spread of the Gospel. (GS 43)*

### b. The Magisterium does not teach authoritatively on practical solutions.

Temporal affairs are the particular responsibility of the laity, who have expertise in secular disciplines. They cannot suppose that the clergy have all the answers.

*Secular duties and activities belong properly although not exclusively to laymen. Therefore acting as citizens in the world, whether individually or socially, they will keep the laws proper to each discipline, and labor to equip themselves with a genuine expertise in their various fields. They will gladly work with men seeking the same goals. Acknowledging the demands of faith and endowed with its force, they will unhesitatingly devise new enterprises, where they are appropriate, and put them into action. Laymen should also know that it is generally the function of their well-formed Christian conscience to see that the divine law is inscribed in the life of the*

*earthly city; from priests they may look for spiritual light and nourishment. Let the layman not imagine that his pastors are always such experts, that to every problem which arises, however complicated, they can readily give him a concrete solution, or even that such is their mission. Rather, enlightened by Christian wisdom and giving close attention to the teaching authority of the Church, let the layman take on his own distinctive role. (GS 43)*

Laymen sometimes disagree about the best concrete solution; no particular course of practical action can be presented as the doctrine of the faith.

*Often enough the Christian view of things will itself suggest some specific solution in certain circumstances. Yet it happens rather frequently, and legitimately so, that with equal sincerity some of the faithful will disagree with others on a given matter. Even against the intentions of their proponents, however, solutions proposed on one side or another may be easily confused by many people with the Gospel message. Hence it is necessary for people to remember that no one is allowed in the aforementioned situations to appropriate the Church's authority for his opinion. They should always try to enlighten one another through honest discussion, preserving mutual charity and caring above all for the common good. (ibid)*

c. The Church has benefitted from the world's progress, and acknowledges the good work done by other churches

*[T]he Catholic Church gladly holds in high esteem the things which other Christian Churches and ecclesial communities have done or are doing cooperatively by way of achieving the same goal. At the same time, she is convinced that she can be abundantly and variously helped by the world in the matter of preparing the ground for the Gospel. This help she gains from the talents and industry of individuals and from human society as a whole. (GS 40)*

For example, Christian theology was developed using the tools offered by classical (pagan) philosophers.

*The experience of past ages, the progress of the sciences, and the treasures hidden in the various forms of human culture, by all of which the nature of man himself is more clearly revealed and new roads to truth are opened, these profit the Church, too. For, from the beginning of her history she has learned to express the message of Christ with the help of the ideas and terminology of various philosophers, and has tried to clarify it with their wisdom, too. (GS 44)*