

THE KINGDOM OF GOD: EVER ANCIENT EVER NEW:
REFLECTIONS UPON THE VATICAN II COUNCIL: PRESENTATION 7
GAUDIUM ET SPES: THE CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH
IN THE MODERN WORLD, PART I: HOPE AND JOY

I. Gaudium et Spes was not initially on the agenda for the Council, but soon became a central document for its deliberation to fulfill calls for dialogue with the world.

A. There was initially no document specifically dealing with the issues of the modern world. But as the Council opened, there were several indications that the Council should deal with the application of the eternal truths to the issues of the modern world.

1. On September 11, 1962, in the lead up to the Council, Pope John XXIII gave an internationally televised talk called “The Church: The Light of the Nations.” That talk provided, not only the subject for the Constitution on the Church, but also a focus on bringing the wisdom of the Church into the issues of the modern world.

2. At end of the First Session, Cardinal Leon Suenens of Brugge, Belgium gave a well-received speech on the focus that the Council should take. Building upon both the insights of Pope John XXIII and his own earlier proposals, he argued that the Church should focus on both internal issues, such as liturgy and revelation, and external issues of the world, such as war, poverty, and the modern economy.

3. Cardinal Giacomo Larcaro of Bologna and Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini of Milan (the future Pope Paul VI) gave speeches supporting this proposal, leading to a call to focus on the world at large.

B. At the request of the Council, Pope John XXIII approved of a Central Coordinating Commission that would guide the drafting of the documents. That Commission added to the initial list of documents for the Council to consider one a constitution that would deal with “the effective presence of the Church in the world today.” The document was initially to have six chapters on: (1) the vocation of man; (2) man and society; (3) marriage and the family; (4) culture; (5) economics and the social order; and (6) the world community and peace. The drafting of the document was assigned to a joint committee chaired by Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, the Prefect of the Holy Office and Chair of the Theological Commission, and Cardinal Fernando Cento, Prefect of the Congregation on the Laity and Chair of the Commission on the Laity. The commission had numerous participants, both bishops and periti, including Bishop John Wright of Pittsburgh and eventually the newly elevated Archbishop Karol Wojtyla of Krakow, later to become Saint Pope John Paul II.

C. By this time the committee presented the document to the Council in October, 1964, the draft was in two parts. The main part of the schema had four chapters on: (1) the human vocation; (2) the Church in the service of God and man; (3) how the Christian should conduct himself in the world; and (4) some special callings of Christians in the modern world. There was also an appendix, which contained sections on: (1) the human

person in society; (2) marriage and the family; (3) the promotion of culture; (4) economic and social issues; and (5) human solidarity and world peace.

D. The Council debated the document for three weeks, with an overall sense of approval, but a number of changes recommended in the approximately 150 speeches made and numerous other written comments given.

E. There were debates about the overall structure and the need for the document.

1. Structurally, many bishops found that having a main part and an extensive appendix was clumsy; it was also unclear what status the appendix had. The committee later made the appendix part II instead. The structure of part I was altered slightly; the structure of the appendix, which became part II, remained basically the same to the end.

2. There were a few bishops such as Archbishops John Heenan of Westminster, England and William Conway of Armagh, Ireland who thought that an ecumenical Council should not take on so many subjects of current interest in a doctrinal statement. Among other things, they pointed out that the situation would change eventually and make the observations dated. And they believed that a much more extensive commentary on each individual issue could be given by the Pope, as previous popes had issued such statements. But most of the bishops thought that the Church should make a statement on the great issues of the day, for teachings alone are vague unless applied to the issues that affect people's lives.

F. There were also a number of individual proposals regarding specific issues.

1. For example, the American bishops, led on this point by Archbishop Patrick O'Boyle of Washington, wanted stronger statements against racism and discrimination generally.

2. Many bishops wanted a more explicit condemnation of communism. However, many bishops from the Eastern European countries opposed such a statement on the grounds that the Communist countries would use such a stance to make things even more difficult for them.

3. With the Cuban missile crisis not long in the past, and with the Cold War on everyone's mind, there was also a call to have more material on the issue of peace.

4. The document did not address the issue of artificial contraception because Pope Paul VI had expressly ordered the committee not to include in the document the question of whether any form of artificial conception could be permitted. A commission appointed by Pope John XXIII and continued by Pope Paul VI was to advise the Pope on this issue. Despite this instruction, many people who wanted a change, including some bishops, brought the issue up anyway. But, citing Casti Cannubi, the section would say clearly that

people should not use family planning methods forbidden by the Church. In 1968, Pope Paul VI published Humanae Vitae, which held that all means of artificial contraception are contrary to the divine law, which calls for sexually to be total and open to children.

G. Many bishops, including Cardinal Frings of Cologne, Germany (whose peritus was Fr. Joseph Ratzinger) thought that the draft was too optimistic, not recognizing enough the flaws of the modern world. The final document would in fact contain more cautionary notes. Many bishops also thought that there should be more emphasis on the Cross and the sanctification of human sufferings and greater on the meaning of the Church. The final document would include some changes along these lines.

H. The Commission presented the next draft of the document to the Council on September 21, 1965.

1. The draft was now called a Pastoral Constitution. Largely because of the efforts of Archbishop Wojtyla, the document included a note that explained the meaning of this designation, which had never before been used for a church document. A Constitution was at the time the designation for the highest level of documents promulgated by the Council, and generally they were understood to deal with doctrinal issues. The note explained that there was a combination of doctrinal teaching and pastoral observations, with the latter subject to changes as the world changes.

2. Some bishops, such as Archbishop Casimiro Gonzales of Madrid objected to the high designation of the document as a constitution. He considered it to be more at the level of a decree, or perhaps better called a dialogue. But the bishops generally favored the status of a pastoral constitution.

3. There were over two weeks of debate over the document, which led to several more changes, such as the addition of the footnote on the status as a constitution, more focus on the effect of sin, and a direct reference in section 14 to the immortality of the soul.

I. After extensive debate, the final document Gaudium et Spes was put to a vote on the next to last day of the Council, December 7, 1965. The vote was 2309-75, an overwhelming majority, although still with more dissents than most other documents.

II. The overall structure consists of two parts, one on the general principles of the Christian vision of man and society, and the other on the application of these principles to five specific issues.

- A. The structure of the document and each chapter is to present an issue, describe the positive aspects of the modern world, discuss the problems of the modern world, and then show forth the Christian solution in Jesus Christ. Beginning with the first line, there is an attempt to balance positive and negative observations on the humanity in general and the world in particular, pointing to salvation in Jesus Christ and through His Church.

B. There are extensive footnotes from the Bible (indicating its continued application), Church documents (indicating that the Council is building on what has been taught before, not contradicting it), and on occasion from Church fathers (showing the continuing value of their thought in the modern world.) The idea is to emphasize that there is both a timeless wisdom, and also a current application of Catholic teachings.

III. The preface and the introduction set forth the overall point of the constitution.

A. The Preface outlines the purpose of this constitution. Section 1 describes the fact that all aspects of modern times, joy, sorrow, hope and fear, are of concern to the Church. Section 2 describes the project of making helpful observations about the world, the theater of salvation, and its condition. Section 3 sets forth the three overall questions that the constitution will deal with: (1) what is humanity's place in the universe; (2) what is the meaning of human activity; and (3) what is the goal of all of this life. It goes on to phrase the effort in terms of dialogue, cooperation and service, but with an insistence that what the Church presents is the truth.

B. The Introduction then gives overall observations about the modern world, emphasizing the great paradoxes, the opportunities and the difficulties of life today.

1. Section 4 begins with the theme of "reading the sign of the times" applying timeless questions to the modern age. In particular, it describes the great capacity for good and evil in the modern world. Sections 5 through 7 apply this observation to modern phenomena, such as the rise of science and social sciences, industrialization, urbanization, the prominence of mass media, broad scale immigration, and modern understandings of the dignity and rights of all people.

2. Section 8 describes new and sometimes difficult issues that are also arising in today's world, such as: (1) the emphasis on practical aspects of life, but a loss of overall wisdom; (2) specialization that can also lead to isolation; (3) pressures on the family; (4) the increased imbalance between rich and poor nations, which can lead to wars. Section 9 speaks of the rightful desire to overcome these problems, but of the frequent lack of will to do so, and in fact the increasing power of evil as well.

3. Section 10 then wraps up the introduction by contrasting the false solutions of the world with that of Christ. It criticizes such responses as ignoring the problems, seeing them only in a materialistic way, plunging into easy pleasure, or taking refuge in a vague spirituality that has no doctrine or positive idea of the world. In contrast, the Church proclaims Christ as giving meaning to all of human endeavors and history, pointing the way to the greater kingdom.

IV. Part One describes the great themes of the Church and the modern world. After an introduction, the four chapters focus on the dignity of the human person, on the human community, on the meaning of human activity, and on what the Church contributes to the modern world. Its introduction sets forth the project of bringing the light of faith to evaluate the longings of the modern world, which are in themselves good but subject to corruption. It sets forth three questions, similar to those of the Preface, asking what is the churches view of

humanity, what should be done to build up society, and what is the final meaning of human activity. The first three chapters will each deal with one of these questions.

V. Chapter 1, which consists of sections 12-22, describes a rightful view of the human person. It especially takes on atheism, both practical and theoretical, and (as with the rest of the constitution) brings everything back to Christ.

A. The chapter begins with a fundamental question that most worldly programs ignore, what is man? The document agrees with the modern view that society should be ordered to the good of humanity, individually and collectively. But it makes little sense to try to order things for the benefit of humanity without answering the question of what makes us who we are and what our rightful goal is. Section 12 presents the erroneous extremes: (1) radical autonomy, the view that humanity is responsible to itself with no other reference; and (2) the view that humanity is nothing but a cog in the material machine. The Church presents the dignity and glory of humanity by saying that we are children of God, made in His image and likeness. Central to our calling is the ability to love others, a calling that is particularly clear in the complementary love of marriage.

B. Section 13 then gives the balancing consideration, i.e. that we are weighed down with sin, both original and personal. We see the division that sin causes by our experience, such that we are in conflict both within ourselves and with each other. And we can never overcome this sin on our own. Once again, we are pointed toward Christ.

C. Sections 14-17 describe what we mean when we say that we are created in God's image. It goes through what it means to be body and spirit and to have an intellect and free will. As section 14 describes, we are body and soul and progress in the material realm towards the spiritual one, but are weighed down by sin. Section 15 says that in the modern world we have come to know more about the material world, but have often lost the ability or even desire to see the greater realm that gives our life meaning. This section calls people to seek again this wisdom, both for spiritual meanings and to ensure that progress is creative, and not a source of destruction. Section 16 speaks of the conscience as God's voice in our souls, making known to us the law of love, but also subject to error and thus in need of guidance. Section 17 commends the modern desire for freedom, but then goes on to ask the question, what is freedom. True freedom means participating in the creative goodness of God and thus attaining eternal glory.

D. Sections 18 – 22 then take on the realities of death and of atheism.

1. Section 18 confronts the reality of death, which conflicts with our desire for eternity, for a love beyond death. No worldly progress can in the end resolve this conflict. But here again Christ is the solution, winning the path from death to eternal life.

2. Sections 19-21 then take on the issue of atheism. These sections respond both to the materialistic attitude often present in the world and to specifically atheistic regimes such as socialism. They recognize the concerns atheism raises, but says that taking refuge in practical or theoretical atheism ignores the deepest reality of God and His love for us.

a. Section 19 addresses individual atheism, which rejects the core of our calling for God. This section addresses the causes of atheism, such as philosophical arguments, an exaggerated view of the scope of science, rebellion against repressive religious, but also indifference.

b. Section 20 then discusses systems of atheism that are common in the modern world, such as social Darwinism, communism, and a belief in salvation through technology that seek what they think of as liberation from faith.

c. Section 21 responds to these objections of systematic atheism. The Council recognizes that injustices have been done in the name of religion, including persecutions and religious wars. But it says that such things are a perversion of religion not its essence. The constitution points out that the Church's vision of humanity, including especially our status as sons and daughters of God and the call to everlasting life, gives us a sense of dignity and rights and a meaning to our activity that no worldly system can provide.

3. Section 22 then concludes this first chapter by once again calling people back to Christ, who, by His incarnation, life on earth, suffering, Resurrection and sending of the Holy Spirit, reveals to us the fullness of the glory of man.

VI. Chapter 2, which consists of section 23-32, then turns to society at large, both in and among nations. It consists of an introduction, a commentary on seven specific aspects of society, and then a conclusion that again brings all things to Christ.

A. The introduction in sections 23 and 24 give the overall perspective and principles. Section 23 states that a central theme in the modern world is the increasing interdependence and interaction among people, which can lead to greater dialogue, but does not itself necessarily create progress. Section 24 reaffirms what should be obvious, but can easily be ignored, namely that the Bible's commandments of love of God and neighbor is central to our callings on earth.

B. Section 25 affirms that each human person is a social being and finds fulfillment in societies, not simply as an individual. The first society is the family, with the political community also being a natural society.

C. Section 26 calls for people to recognize the need for upholding the "common good," a central tenant of Catholic teachings. On the one hand, each person and each society should uphold the good of all; there should not be a sense of looking out only for oneself, or even only for one's family or nation. On the other hand, each individual does have his own dignity and should never be used as a mere means. The Council warns against both extremes of radical individualism and radical consequentialism.

D. Section 27 then focuses on respect for the rights and dignity of each person. It lists many particular crimes against people, such as abortion, suicide, torture, subhuman living

and working conditions, and human trafficking. We have an obligation not only to avoid such crimes but also to combat them.

E. Section 28 then calls for understanding of those with whom we disagree, opposing error but still having love for the person who is in error. There is a balancing between indifferentism and an unforgiving justice.

F. Section 29 describes what we mean by human equality. Our equality come for the fact that we all share in the glory of having the Almighty God as our Creator, Christ as our Redeemer, and heaven as our calling. This equality does not mean that there should be an absolute equality of condition, but does involve upholding the rights of all people, including a share in economic and social wealth needed for human dignity.

G. Section 30 then reminds all people that we must be concerned for the needs of others, individually and as societies. Section 31 builds upon this insight by saying that society should enable each person to participate in its betterment. There is a particular emphasis on education and on social conditions.

H. Section 32 then brings all of these insights back to salvation history. In particular, it describes how God created a society to prepare the way for Christ, how Jesus consecrated each society by living in His own, and how His preaching, death and resurrection join all human societies and point the way to their fulfillment.

VII. Chapter 3 then provides a Catholic commentary on the value of human activity. After an introduction, it describes the goodness of creative activity, the way in which sin can poison this activeness, and again how the solution is found in Christ.

A. Section 33 sets up the issue by observing that, with modern knowledge and cooperation among people, we are able to accomplish vastly more than ever. But this greater ability must be guided by the rightful answers to deepest questions, including what is the value of human activity, how should it be employed, and what is its goal. The next sections answer these questions, with the culmination of the chapter and all of human activity in Christ.

B. Section 34 recalls that we were created from the beginning to make the world a better place by our human endeavor. Such labor is a participation in the creative goodness of God, a service to others, and a fulfillment of the history of salvation. Section 35 adds, however, that the greatest benefit of activity is not in the things or services it produces, but rather in how it develops the human person.

C. Section 36 then describes the interaction between activity in the world and the realm of faith. It acknowledges that each field (e.g., science, history, literature, business) has its own type of perfection and way of progressing. But the faith, as well as natural moral reasoning, does play a crucial role in the development of other field by keeping research within ethical bounds and pointing the way to God. By contrast, as section 37 recognizes, sinfulness distorts human activity in many ways, such as dimming people's perspectives and leading them to destructive activities.

D. Sections 38 and 39 then bring this insight to its conclusion, and answer the third question posed by the introduction to the chapter, by describing the fulfillment of human activity in Christ. Section 38 emphasizes that Christ gives us the image of God's love and enables us to live by it. This love is meant to be the basis for all human activity, not just religious or seemingly important matters. Section 39 then describes how this passing world will give way to a greater one. But this knowledge does not make us less concerned with improving this world, but more so, for our good actions on this earth will be perfected and glorified forever in that eternal kingdom.

VIII. Chapter 4 then sets up the second part of the constitution by describing the role of the Church in the modern world. It describes what the Church offers other people, together and individually and what the Church receives from the world. Once again, it concludes the chapter and part I by referring all things back to Christ.

A. Section 40 sets up the issue by describing how the Church interacts with the world. The Church gives to the world insight into the importance of each human person, the value of society, and the goals of human activity, pointing the way towards a greater realm.

B. Sections 41 – 43 then outline each of these points by assisting individuals, society and human activity.

1. Section 41 describes how the Church helps individuals by providing the deepest meaning of life, the firmest grounds for defending the rights of humanity in God's law and wisdom regarding our final calling.
2. Section 42 draws a clear distinction with regard to the Church's role in society. She is open to all legitimate forms of government, economy and society; but she seeks to bring the law and love of God to all of them.
 - a. Thus, the section begins by saying that Jesus Christ "did not bequeath to the Church a mission in the political, economic or social order; the purpose He assigned was religious. But this religious mission can be the source of commitment, direction and vigor to establish and consolidate the human community according to the law of God." In particular the section says that the Church initiates actions, such as works of mercy to benefit everyone, especially those in need, and witnesses to the fact that true peace and progress come from true faith and love.
 - b. With reference to international relations, the section says "the Church is universal in that she is not committed to any one culture or any political, economic or social system." Precisely because of this universality, she can promote a harmony between nations based upon the law of God. The section concludes that the Church that she seeks to assist "any regime that recognizes the basic rights of the person and the family and the requirements of the common good."

3. Likewise, section 43 describes the role of Christians in the world. Once again, there is a careful balance in upholding our final divine end, but also recognizing that advancing toward that end involves activity to make this world a better place.
 - a. The section says that “it is primarily to the laity that secular duties and activity properly belongs.” And in particular, the section says that the faithful should seek “to cultivate a properly formed conscience and to impress the divine law on the affairs of the earthly city.” It calls for the laity to consult the Church and the clergy for clearer understanding of the divine law, but also says that they must use their own judgment and talents as well.
 - b. The section recognizes that some of the faithful will see a solution to problems in one way, “yet it happens rather frequently, and legitimate so, that some of the faithful, with no less sincerity, will see the problem quite differently.” In that case, the Church cannot be identified with one solution or the other, but rather, the parties should “try to guide each other by sincere dialogue in the spirit of mutual charity and with a genuine concern for the common good of all.” The Council is thus indicating that we should distinguish between fundamental principles of right and wrong and judgement calls in how the carry them out.

C. Section 44 then describes how the world helps the Church as well. The increase in knowledge of science and of human culture have helped the Church understand and proclaim the faith better. The Church tries to speak to all cultures and nations. And, to the degree that advancements help this communication and understanding they help the Church. Furthermore, because the Church is built from good families, cultures and societies, whatever helps build these institutions also helps build the Church.

D. Section 45 concludes the first part by pointing the way to Jesus Christ, who with His Church and the sending of the Spirit, brings societies to their fulfillment. The chapter and all of part I end with a reminder that Jesus Christ will come to judge all things, and thus that all of our activity and view toward this world should be governed by this anticipation of the reign of Christ.