

Joy and Hope in Christ: Vatican II

Part 18 in a series

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This year, 2012, marks the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, which began on October 11, 1962, and closed on December 8, 1965. Throughout the year, we celebrate the Council, and explore its teachings through bulletin inserts, lectures, and a variety of special events. You'll find the entire series at the Cathedral website, www.stjames-cathedral.org.

***Gaudium et Spes*: The Church in the Modern World**

"The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts" (1). With these sublime words the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, begins. By far the longest of the Council's documents, *Gaudium et Spes* is a far-ranging expression of the solidarity of the Church with the whole human family, with whom the Church both rejoices and suffers, and to whom she proclaims the Gospel of Christ.

"Schema 13" becomes *Gaudium et Spes*

Before the Council began, Cardinal Suenens complained to Pope John XXIII that there were too many documents—the bishops had been sent more than 70 different texts to review. The Pope asked Suenens to suggest a way to organize this multitude of text. Suenens proposed that the Church look *ad intra*, at its self-governance, its relationships with groups within the Church, but also *ad extra*, at its relationship with the world. Eventually, these two broad themes would be addressed in two of the Constitutions. *Lumen Gentium*, on the nature of the Church, looks *ad intra*. And *Gaudium et Spes* looks *ad extra*.

The *schema* or draft document was known as "Schema 13" simply because that was the number assigned it in a list of the documents to be discussed by the Council Fathers. Only in the Fourth Session was it finally given a name. The final document is divided into two main parts. Part One is entitled "The Church and Man's Vocation" and deals with the nature of the human person, and the responsibilities of individuals and societies. Part Two, "Some More Urgent Problems," addresses some key issues in the modern world: marriage and the family; culture; economic and social life; the political community; and, finally, the fostering of peace and the establishment of a community of nations.

Some Teachings of *Gaudium et Spes*

- There is a deepening dichotomy in the modern world. On the one hand, there is an increasing desire for equality: of poor nations, of women, of workers and farmers. And yet, even as modern communications media bring the world closer together, the divisions between rich and poor seem to be widening and the danger of war seems closer than ever. These stark dichotomies in the world are reflected in the individual, "torn by a welter of anxieties... blurred by materialism." In the face of all this division, within and without, the Church points to Christ, "the key, the center, and the purpose of the whole of man's history" (10).
- Atheism is a growing problem in the modern world, and it is important to understand that many different mindsets may be



described with the same term. Christians have a responsibility to share the authentic teaching of Christ. We need to do this not only with cogent words, but with deeds. The scandalous divisions among Christians, and the hypocrisy that is evident when faith does not permeate the entire life of a Christian, are both contributing factors to the growth of atheism.

- Every person created in God's likeness and is endowed with human dignity. All crimes against life itself, or against the dignity of the human person—murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, slavery, prostitution, and so many others—do more damage to those who perpetrate them even than to the victims. While people obviously have different capacities, they are essentially equal: "forms of social or cultural discrimination in basic personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language or religion, must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design" (29).
- *Gaudium et Spes* marks a real development in the Church's teaching on marriage, which is here seen more as covenant than contract. Procreation is not the sole end of marriage: in their mutual love, married couples give witness to the God of love.
- The economy, both on the national and global levels, must be infused with morality. Investment is good, but its chief purpose is to "provide for the future and strike a rightful balance between the needs of present-day consumption, individual and collective, and the requirement of investment for future generations" (70). Those with responsibility in these areas must keep in mind "the pressing needs of underdeveloped countries."
- *Gaudium et Spes* ends with teachings on peace and war. We live in an era when new kinds of weapons bring a new "savagery" to war, threatening "barbarities far surpassing those of former ages" (79). Thus "a completely fresh reappraisal of war" is needed (80), because the very existence of future generations depends on it. The Council condemns the arms race as "one of the greatest curses on the human race" (81) because its effectiveness as a deterrent to war is questionable, and because "the harm it inflicts on the poor is more than can be endured" (81).
- "Frank dialogue" is the means to achieve these ends. "We are all called to be brothers; we ought to work together without violence and without deceit to build up the world in a spirit of genuine peace" (92). There are no easy solutions, but dialogue and honesty are the way to begin.

Corinna Laughlin, Pastoral Assistant for Liturgy