

GAUDIUM ET SPES

The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World

with Mary McCaughey



Gaudium et Spes is the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World from the Second Vatican Council. The words Gaudium et Spes mean the joys and the hopes. The document is trying to remind Catholics that they can be open to the world, to dialogue with the world, because the joys, hopes and the sorrows of human beings are of their concern.

Gaudium et Spes is a pertinent document because it addresses the entire human family, regardless of religious affiliation or none. Despite the fact that it was written in 1965, the thrust of it is very relevant to our own times, continually calling the whole Church to enter into and maintain a dialogue with the whole human family. The goal of Gaudium et Spes is to shed light on the human mystery and seeks to contribute to the solutions required to solve contemporary problems.

As Mary McCaughey comments in her opening remarks of the video, the document has been described as having a ‘positive openness’. She goes on to say that it answers the question ‘why’ and also the question ‘how’ should the Church be interested in the modern world? The why relates to the fact that the world is God’s creation and is good – whatever goes on in the world, God does not and never will abandon it. This is the world into which Christ came to redeem and to break the power of sin. We are called, therefore, to be open to the world, even if that doesn’t mean embracing everything that the world offers.

Human Dignity

Preface, articles 1-3, Introductory Statement (articles 4-10) and Chapter 1, articles 11-22.

At the heart of this section of the document is the Church’s desire to enter into dialogue with the entire human family. It is important that the Church takes seriously the responsibility to read the signs of the times and respond accordingly.

Q1. Given that the document is as relevant today as it was in 1965, what are the signs in our own times and how are we being asked to respond today?

Q2. The title of the Document means joys and hopes – what are the joys and hopes that we encounter in our world today?

Q3. What are those things which cause us to be anxious – that cause us spiritual uneasiness?

Q4. In what areas of life is the Church being called to shed light and bring life to the world?

Article 16 has a focus on conscience – we are called to love good and to avoid evil. The document says, ‘Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of humankind’.

Q1. What does your conscience mean to you and how does it have an impact upon your decision making or the challenges which you face in life?

Q2. How do you discern what God is asking of you at any one time?

Article 24 gives voice to the uniqueness of the human person - the *‘only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find him or herself, except through a sincere gift of self’*. Whilst we are social beings, we need to be aware that developments in the modern world can have an impact on the social nature of the human being. Whilst technological advancements have great benefits, they can also lead to a diminished quality of relationality.

Q1. What concerns you most about modern developments today?

Q2. How does the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes* help you to make sense of the world as it is and specifically the role of the Church in the world?

The Church in the World

Three chapters make up this section and reflect on the Church’s relationship with the World and specifically the community of humankind, the activity of humanity in the world and finally the role of the Church in the Modern World.

At the heart of Catholic Teaching is a commitment to the happiness, health, and safety of all humanity. The Constitution reflects this but acknowledges also that tensions can arise when faced with the challenges that politics, economic and social needs can present us with.

Q1. In what ways do I/we seek to build our world, especially our own communities.

Q2. What do we find most difficult to deal with and how does our understanding of Gaudium et Spes help us to overcome these difficulties or work with them.

Q3. How are we called to live the “law of love” (article 38).

As the longest of the Four Constitutions, there are many more questions that could be explored. Do not feel constrained by these questions but explore what interests the group most.

Concluding Prayer

Conclude with a prayer of thanksgiving for the time together.

