



Summary of *Gaudium et Spes* – Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World

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Gaudium et Spes, Latin for “Joy and Hope,” is one of the primary documents of the Second Vatican Council. It addresses the Church’s key responsibility in the world, emphasizing dialogue and speaking to important moral and ethical issues. The document weighs in on the dignity of the human person, the challenges of social justice, and the pursuit of peace and solidarity. *Gaudium et Spes* calls for the Church to be a beacon of hope, promoting human rights, pointing to the significant need to address the marginalized and oppressed. This document accentuates the importance of dialogue with all people of goodwill, regardless of religious or cultural differences, in building a more just and humane world, acknowledging our differences and being clear that we are all equal before God. This document is possibly even more meaningful today than when it was written sixty years ago, respective to all the divisiveness in our world, respecting and accepting others, irrespective of our differences needs to be honored.

Cardinal Montini (who would become Pope Paul VI) stood before the Second Vatican Council and stated: *The Church is nothing by itself. It is not so much that the Church has Christ, but that Christ has the Church to carry on his work of bringing salvation to all.*

No document of Vatican II changed so radically than *Gaudium et Spes*: there were four complete rewrites. Many questions were raised, so that the Church and society might work together to resolve them. The Fathers of Vatican II labored very hard at trying to get a better grasp of humanity and comprehend the deeper responsibilities of being human: What is God’s plan for humanity?

Clearly, humans were not created to live for themselves, life rests in relationships. To live more fully, the priority of life is to be focused on truth, justice, freedom, and love. Christ established the Church to serve humanity in this pursuit and to help those who seek holiness. In the end life is about sharing the mystery of God’s awesome love.

Brief Summary

The unchangeable truths are the world is God’s creation and is sustained by God, and the world was freed from sin by Christ and is continually recreated and brought to its destiny under the power of the Holy Spirit. In light of the Gospel, the Church is to offer the human race the saving resources given to it by Christ. The Church is to seek to provide meaningful answers to the questions people have about life.

The creative energies of people and their intellect produce social transformation, some good and some bad. There is a spiritual deficiency in the world. People want things to happen now, they are not satisfied with waiting and in many cases don’t mature at a rate equal to what they desire. Traditions and values are being lost. Moral conflicts are escalating as a result of a false way of living, and people’s moral conscience is playing less and less of a role. Oppression and neglect for the poor is escalating. This is at the heart of the world’s mistrust and division. The world is capable of acts that uplift life and acts that destroy life. This situation is rooted in ambition. There is an addiction to material things. In the end material things will never provide lasting happiness. Yet, there are many who desire to know what the purpose of life is. The Church

believes that in pursuing Christ we can find answers to this question. Finding answers to life's problems rests in Jesus. Lying beneath all chaos rests the unchanging and loving God.

Part One – The Church and Man's Vocation

We must try and understand the needs, events, and desires of the world. Who are we? What do we need to do better as a society? What do the actions and thoughts of the world mean? How can the world better fulfill God's will? How can I?

Chapter One – The Dignity of the Human Person

- The dignity of being human stems from being created in God's image. This image is severely damaged by sin and purchased back at a heavy price by Christ.
- Humans are composed of body and soul; we are to love them both.
- We progress as we seek truth, seeing beyond what our eyes reveal.
- There is a *law of love* written in our heart.
- There is an inner voice that calls us to love God and humanity.
- We have an ability to choose God or not.
- Not choosing God is what in the end eliminates that which binds us to God.
- In Christ sorrow and death take on meaning.
- In following Jesus, we learn to love in such a way that our truest self is revealed.

Chapter Two – The Community of Mankind

- We find our truest self when we seek what is good not only for us, but for all.
- The progress of one life goes hand-in-hand with the progress of society.
- Economies, politics, and the pursuit of social status contribute to much of the conflict in the world.
- Pride and selfishness can only be overcome with the help of grace.
- Good prevails when people have access to food, clothing, shelter, freedom, the right to have a family or not, employment, education, a sound name, privacy, to follow one's conscience, and a choice to choose God or not.
- Society improves based on truth and survives on justice and love.
- Those most in need must be heard, and that great need should disturb the conscience of humanity.
- Life is to be preserved and elevated at all costs.
- We must learn to love and respect those who think differently than us. In accepting them we should seek to understand, and in understanding we can seek out truth.
- Those we know to be in error are to be loved. We never have the right to judge the heart of another.
- Many will seek to elevate their stature in life, but the truth is there is basic equality in all humanity.
- Each of us is responsible for fulfilling the call to live justly and to walk in love always.
- God created us to be social, and we are bound together.

Chapter Three – Man's Activity in the Universe

- Through work we can develop ourselves as individuals.
- A person is truly valued by who they are, not by what they do.
- Whatever is done to promote justice and dignity is infinitely more valuable than what is technologically created.
- Peace is threatened wherever self-centeredness exists. The hope of the world rests in love.

Chapter Four – The Role of the Church

- The Church is the sign of the presence of God.
- The Church exists because of God's love for us.
- Unity is to be sought through the Church. God leads us to His truth. Through the *Word of God*, the Church proclaims the rights of humankind.
- Divine law always has precedence over human laws.
- The Church's greatest responsibility and challenge is to promote and attain unity.

- One cannot separate faith from secular life.
- When we disagree, we should not attempt to persuade someone as if we are speaking for God and His Church.
- We need to enter into honest discussion with mutual love and respect. Christ was, is, and always will be the center of the Church.

Part Two – Some More Urgent Problems

Five priorities of concern: Marriage and family, human culture, social-political and economic life, bonds among nations, and war and peace.

Chapter One – The Dignity of Marriage and the Family

- Marriage promotes a healthy human society.
- Society is harmed by polygamy, divorce, free-love, excessive self-love, and improper use of birth control.
- Sacramental married life is a covenantal love of man and woman, created by God.
- All Sacraments are a sign of God's faithful love and are sources of grace.
- Love in marriage is divinely ordained love and is expressed through holy sex and lived out in raising a family.
- The intimate love of marriage is expressed and perfected through sexual intercourse.
- The Church rejects the early ending of any human life. All human life comes from God and is sacred.
- To raise children best, a father should be fully present as well as a nurturing mother.

Chapter Two – Proper Development of Culture

- Culture implies community living.
- Growth in natural human and social science, as well as communications and technology, provide a means to change culture positively and negatively.
- There are many challenging and difficult questions facing the world: How do we blend knowledge with realized truths, in order that this knowledge does not become an end in itself, but rather leads to true wisdom? How do we separate ourselves from aspects of culture that do not lead to God and promote humanism?
- Faith and culture have many of the same goals. They both can elevate humanity through goodness and beauty.
- Faith points people toward a divine life of truth and justice.
- The Church will never be bound to culture or any period of history.
- The Church must remain faithful to its traditions and be responsive to its universal mission.
- If a culture is to be of value, it must provide people freedom to search for truth, to speak out, and to openly express beliefs.
- The way truths of faith are expressed often determines how well they take root.

Chapter Three – Economic and Social Life

- There is more than enough available to the world to provide for the needs of humanity.
- Those consumed by the enhancement of their own personal lives is what mostly prevents those in dire need from having what will sustain them.
- The purpose of currency and material resources is not to gain wealth for wealth's own sake, or to dominate others.
- A just world seeks to provide opportunities for all to grow intellectually and morally.
- The act of work is a greater value to a human being than to seek material wealth.
- Through work one should have the ability to support themselves and their family. Work is how we can serve one another.
- There should be incentive in place for one to have private ownership and private control over their possessions.

Chapter Four – The Political Community

- Authority is required in society in order to prevent people from persecuting others.
- Authority must function as a moral force and not as a tyranny.
- Governments exist for the sake of people.
- People should always have a voice in choosing those who represent them, and it is the duty of citizens to actively vote for their leaders.
- The laws of society must protect the rights of people.
- When a government takes on too much authority it weakens the sense of responsibility individuals, families, and groups must take ownership for.
- Citizens should be loyal to their country, but not at the expense of becoming blind to the needs of people in the world.
- The truest duty politically is to oppose injustice, oppression, and intolerance.
- Church and government are rightly independent and self-governing.
- The work of the Church is to preach the Christian faith and teach social doctrines.
- The Church has the right and responsibility to pass moral judgments on society when the salvation of souls are at stake.

Chapter Five – Fostering Peace

- Peace is not the absence of war. True peace is of God, it involves the harmony of people and pursuing justice.
- Peace is directly relevant to people's ability to love.
- Peace will never be obtained or maintained unless people can trust and share.
- Peace requires sincere respect for others and an effort to see that the basic human needs of others are met.
- Peace flows from Christ.
- Governments have a legitimate right to defend themselves. They have a duty to protect their citizens.
- No nation is free to choose to wage war for gain in any way.
- Blind obedience to a nation is never an excuse to destroy populated areas. The destruction of inhabited areas of people is a crime against God and humanity.
- Peace is not possible where injustice, economic inequality, thirst for power, or disregard for human life exist.
- The escalating population in the world is a serious concern and should be addressed. The solution to this problem must agree with moral law.

Conclusion

All that is stated in *Guadium et Spes* is rooted in the Gospel. The Church recognizes that it needs to engage others with more pronounced goodwill, and to embrace those who do not believe in Christ but also desire peace. Christians have the greater responsibility to introduce love to the world. The love we give must seek to be rooted in the love we receive from Christ. When we seek to have Christ present in all we do, the love of Christ is revealed.

Final Personal Comments

Most cultures in the world no longer have a true focus on Christ. In many of these cultures Christian identity is being lost because people have stopped meditating on reality. Most of the world's cultures teach that accomplishing and possessing more defines a successful life, and most people fear losing what they have. The focus is not on who I am, but on what I do, the need to gain more materially, and to create ways to feel safe in an un-safe world. In our own nation there is tremendous divisiveness growing politically, and to a certain extent ethically and morally. Imitating Christ is becoming more removed from the Christian's equation, and our lives appear to becoming less and less about being faithful to God and trying to become molded more into the likeness of Jesus.

Salvation rests alone in Christ and in him we find our truest self. In this regard, we all play a role in trying to point people one-by-one to Christ. The strongest critics say: *The Church is undergoing her worst crisis since the Arian heresy ... Vatican II has set off neo-modernism. ... The fruit is bad, so the tree is bad. It is an instrument of Satan.* I say they are dead wrong. I say we must become much more spiritually mature. I say there must be much greater loyalty given by all Catholics to the Vicar of Christ. I say the lack of these two things have contributed greatly to the spirit of Vatican II not being lived out more. I say that we need to stop just accepting what is convenient and advantageous.

Life needs to become less and less about what I do and what I have and become about who I am becoming. Life needs to become much more about seeking the truth and cultivating the soul. Human life is meant to be connected to God's holiness and becoming shaped by it. Christ is the one who offers us hope and joy, for he gives true meaning to life. Translated; *Guadium et Spes* translates into *Hope and Joy!* The laborious and serious work of Vatican II was unmistakably touched by the Holy Spirit. Vatican II still challenges us to discover who we are. It promised hope and joy! It centered us on becoming more by centering oneself on Christ, in and through his Church. For the Catholic Church is not a purely human reality or product; it is fundamentally a work of God. The Church is a mystery because it is, like Jesus Christ, a union of the divine and the human. It will never be a mere human organization as some want to paint it. The Church will be a mystery because its membership includes not only followers of Jesus on earth but also those who are with Christ in heaven. Hope and joy rests in love – God's love and aiming to mirror it!