

The Church's Relationship with the World

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The Second Vatican Council offered a vision of the relationship of the Church in the world in the document, *Gaudium et Spes* ("Joy and Hope"), also known as *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*.

Gaudium et Spes begins by recognizing that the Church and the world can cooperate in helping to promote respect for and peace among all people of the world (3). The Church's ministry is to witness to Christ's love, compassion, and peace in the world.

Because Christ is perfect God and perfect human, his life is the model of being human. His ministry on earth is the model for our way of living in the world (3-22).

The Church encourages the building up of the common good, since all belong to the one human family. This means all people should have access to the basic necessities of life: education, meaningful work, food, shelter, freedom, "right to a good name," and freedom of religion (26). The Church is a sacrament, the Council affirmed. This means that the Church is a visible sign to the world of the love, peace, compassion, and unity (communion) God has made possible in the Church (42). True compassion and peace cannot be found in wealth, power, prestige, conflicts among various peoples and nations, nor in the power of the powerful over those with little power. Here, the Council says, the world can learn from the Church in this regard.

The document also notes that the Church can learn from the world. The changes in social living and the vast array of languages and cultures can help the Church to preach and live Christ's message more fully (44). No matter the exchange between the world and the Church, the Council insists that Christ's vision of peace and harmony is the true calling and mission of the Church (45).

The document then goes into certain problems of the modern world: the family, economic life, cultural life, and political life. The purpose of all of these spheres of life, of course, is to promote the dignity of the person and to build up



society and the entire human community. The Gospel guides us to be faithful citizens striving for the common good.

Turning to peace, the document states: "Peace is more than the absence of war" (78). While war is destructive to human life and community, there is a deeper sense that peace is "the love of neighbor" (78). The love of Christ overcomes all violence and hatred, not only war. Violence fractures communities and individuals. Love, particularly the love of Christ, builds peace, justice, and truth.

In *Gaudium et Spes*, the Church envisions building a more just world through dialogue that is both respectful and prophetic. "Such a mission requires us first of all to create in the church itself mutual esteem, reverence and harmony and to acknowledge all legitimate diversity. . . . For the ties which unite the faithful together are stronger than those which separate them; let there be unity in what is necessary, freedom in what is doubtful, and charity in everything" (92). All people, of various religions and cultures, can work together for the common good of all.

Gaudium et Spes challenges us to collaborate with others to ensure just practices that promote the dignity of all, especially in the achievement of the basic necessities of human life. Being a disciple, then, is practicing justice, peace, and charity in cooperation with those in the various communities in the one human family.

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