

MIDEAST VOICES



Mideast Voice of the Poor, Columbus, OH

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Gaudium et Spes:

Pastoral Constitution on The Church in the Modern World

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Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on The Church in the Modern World) was promulgated on December 7, 1965 by Pope Paul VI at the end of Vatican II. It consists of numbered 93 paragraphs. The first paragraph states, “*The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in an, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in an way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every man. That is why this community realizes that it is truly and intimately linked with mankind and its history.*” What a wonderful summary of our call as Vincentians in our ministry to those we serve!

The document goes on to address the current (1965) world situation. Paragraph 4 states, “*To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in light of the gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about the present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its expectations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics.*” Every generation is thus challenged anew to evaluate and act on the signs of the times.

After setting the stage of the world situation, *Gaudium et Spes* then addresses a number of issues the human community was grappling with at that time and continues to grapple with today, including:

Basic equality of humans based in human dignity - Paragraph 29: “*Since all men possess a rational soul and are created in God’s likeness, since they have the same nature and origin, have been redeemed by Christ, and enjoy the same divine calling and destiny, the basic equality of all must receive increasingly greater recognition.*

True, all men are not alike from the point of view of varying physical power and the diversity of intellectual and moral resources. Nevertheless, with respect to the

fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language, or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent."

Private property - universal purpose of created things - Paragraph 69: *"God intended the earth and all that it contains for the use of every human being and people. Thus, as all men follow justice and unite in charity, created good should abound for them on a reasonable basis. Whatever the forms of ownership may be, as adapted to the legitimate institutions of people according to diverse and changeable circumstances, attention must always be paid to the universal purpose for which created goods are meant. In using them, therefore, a man should regard his lawful possessions not merely as his own but also as common property in the sense that they should accrue to the benefit of not only himself but of others."*

Private property - limited by the demands of the common good - Paragraph 71: *"Ownership and other forms of private control over material goods contribute to the expression of personality. Moreover, they furnish men with an occasion for exercising their role in society and the economy. Hence, it is very important to facilitate the access of both individuals and communities to some control over material goods. The right of private control, however, is not opposed to the right inherent in the various forms of public ownership. Still, goods can be transferred to the public domain only by competent authority, according to the demands and within the limits of the common good, and with fair compensation. It is a further right of public authority to guard against any misuse of private property that injures the common good."*

The common good - numerous paragraphs including paragraph 59: *"Because it flows immediately from man's spiritual and social nature, culture has constant need of a just freedom if it is to develop. It also needs the legitimate possibility of exercising its independence according to its own principles. Rightly, therefore, it demands respect and enjoys a certain inviolability, at least as long as the rights of the individual and of the community, whether particular or universal, are preserved within the context of the common good."*

Christian Duty and Vocation to Serve the Common Good - Paragraph 75: *"Let all Christians appreciate their special and personal vocation to the political community. This vocation requires that they give conspicuous example of devotion to the sense of duty and of service to the advancement of the common good. Thus they can also show in practice how authority is to be harmonized with freedom, personal initiative with the consideration of the bonds uniting the whole social body, and necessary unity with beneficial diversity."*

Justice and Equity in the Economy - Paragraph 66: *"If the demands of justice and equity are to be satisfied, vigorous efforts must be made, without violence to the rights of persons or to the natural characteristics of each country, to remove as quickly as possible the immense inequalities which now exist. In many cases, these are worsening*

and are connected with individual and group discrimination.

In many areas, too, farmers experience special difficulties in raising products or in selling them. In such cases, country people must be helped to increase and to market what they produce, to make necessary advances and changes, and to obtain a fair return. Otherwise, as too often happens, they will remain in the condition of lower-class citizens. Let farmers, especially young ones, skillfully apply themselves to perfecting their professional competence. Without it, no agricultural progress can take place."

Human Labor - Paragraph 67: *"Human labor which is expended in the production and exchange of goods and in the performance of economic services is superior to the other elements of economic life. For the latter have only the nature of tools.*

Whether it is engaged in independently or paid for by someone else, this labor comes immediately from the person. In a sense, the person stamps the things of nature with his seal and subdues it to his will. It is ordinarily by his labor that a man supports himself and his family, is joined to his fellow men and serves them, and is enabled to exercise genuine charity and be a partner in the work of bringing God's creation to perfection. Indeed, we hold that by offering his labor to God a man becomes associated with the redemptive work itself of Jesus Christ, who conferred eminent dignity on labor when at Nazareth he worked with his own hands."

Value of Worker Participation - Paragraph 68: *"In economic enterprises it is persons who work together, that is, free and independent human beings created in the image of God. Therefore the active participation of everyone in the running of an enterprise should be promoted. This participation should be exercised in appropriately determined ways. It should take into account each person's functions, whether it be one of ownership, hiring, management, or labor. It should provide for the necessary unity of operations.*

However, decisions concerning economic and social conditions, on which the future of workers and their children depends, are rather often made not within the enterprise itself but by institutions on a higher level. Hence the workers themselves should have a share also in controlling these institutions, either in person or through freely elected delegates."

War and Peace - Cooperation with Christ's Gift of Peace - Paragraph 77: *"In our generation, when men continue to be afflicted by acute hardships and anxieties arising from ongoing wars or the threat of them, the whole human family has reached an hour of supreme crisis in its advance to maturity. Moving gradually together and everywhere more conscious already of its oneness, this family cannot accomplish its task of constructing for all men everywhere a world more genuinely human unless each person devotes himself with renewed determination to the reality of peace. Thus it happens that the gospel message, which is in harmony with the loftier striving and aspirations of the human race, takes on a new luster in our days as it declares that the artisans of peace are blessed, "For they shall be called children of God"(Matt. 5:9)."*

Voice of the Poor (VOP) Voice of the Poor does not take positions for or against a political party or individual candidates. However, Voice of the Poor is interested in working with those elected officials, whether Republicans or Democrats, who support initiatives that will benefit the poor, children, elderly, immigrants – documented or not, and all of those who SVdP cares for and serves.

Prayer for Systemic Change

We praise and thank you, O God, Creator of the Universe. You have made all things good and have given us the earth to cultivate. Grant that we may always use created things gratefully, and share them generously with those in need. Give us creativity in helping the poor meet their basic human needs. Open our minds and hearts so that we might stand at their side and assist them to change whatever unjust structures keep them poor. Enable us to be brothers and sisters to them, friends who walk with them in their struggle for fundamental human rights. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

From: National Voice of the Poor

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