

Weekly Reflections from Vatican II

52 Quotes from the Council Documents

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The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 1).

The sacred council has set out to impart an ever-increasing vigor to the Christian lives of the faithful; to adapt more closely to the needs of our age those institutions which are subject to change; to encourage whatever can promote the union of all who believe in Christ, to strengthen whatever serves to call all of humanity into the church's fold (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 1).

For the church is both human and divine, visible but endowed with invisible realities, zealous in action and dedicated to contemplation, present in the world, yet a migrant, so constituted that in it the human is directed toward and subordinated to the divine, the visible to the invisible, action to contemplation, and this present world to that city yet to come, the object of our quest (see Heb 13:14) (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 2).

Nevertheless, the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the church is directed; it is also the source from which all its power flows (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 10).

It is very much the wish of the church that all the faithful should be let to take that full, conscious, and active part in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy, and to which the Christian people, "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people" (1 Pet 2:9, 4-5) have a right and to which they are bound by reason of their Baptism (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 14).

The rites should radiate a noble simplicity. They should be short, clear, and free from useless repetition. They should be within the people's power of comprehension, and normally should not require much explanation (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 34).

Even in the liturgy the church does not wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not affect the faith or the well-being of the entire community. Rather does it cultivate and foster the qualities and talents of the various races and nations (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 37).

The church, therefore, spares no effort in trying to ensure that, when present at this mystery of faith, Christian believers should not be there as strangers or silent spectators. On the contrary,

having a good grasp of it through the rites and prayers, they should take part in the sacred action, actively, fully aware, and devoutly (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 48).

Hearing the word of God reverently and proclaiming it confidently, this holy synod makes its own the words of St. John: “We proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 Jn 1:2-3) (*Dei Verbum*, no. 1).

By this revelation, then, the invisible God (see Col 1:15; 1 Tim 1:17), from the fullness of his love, addresses men and women as his friends (see Ex 33:11; Jn 15:14-15), and lives among them (see Bar 3:38), in order to invite and receive them into his own company (*Dei Verbum*, no. 2).

At all times and in every nation, anyone who fears God and does what is right has been acceptable to him (see Acts 10:35). He has, however, willed to make women and men holy and to save them not as individuals without any bond between them, but rather to make them into people who might acknowledge him and serve him in holiness (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 9).

Though they differ essentially and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are none the less interrelated; each in its own way shares in the one priesthood of Christ (*Lumen Gentium*, no.10).

Allotting his gifts “at will to each individual” (1 Cor 12:11), he also distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts, he makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the church, as it is written, “the manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit” (1 Cor 12:7) (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 12).

It is the special vocation of the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will. They live in the world, in each and every one of the world’s occupations and callings and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life which, as it were, form the context of their existence. There they are called by God to contribute to the sanctification of the world from within, like leaven, in the spirit to the Gospel, by fulfilling their own particular duties (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 31).

It is therefore quite clear that all Christians in whatever state or walk in life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity, and this holiness is conducive to a more human way of living even in society here on earth (*Lumen Gentium*, no. 40).

Bishops, as legitimate successors of the apostles and members of the episcopal college, should appreciate that they are closely united to each other and should be solicitous for all the churches (*Christus Dominus*, no. 6).

Priests owe it to everybody to share with them the truth of the Gospel in which they rejoice in the Lord (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 4).

Priests, in common with all who have been reborn in the font of Baptism, are brothers among brothers and sisters as members of the same body of Christ which all are commanded to build (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 9).

To foster priestly vocations is the duty of the entire Christian community, and this is done first of all through living a full Christian life (*Optatam Totius*, no. 9).

The up-to-date renewal of the religious life comprises both a constant return to the sources of Christian life in general and to the primitive inspiration of the institutes, and their adaptation to the changes conditions of our time (*Perfectae Caritatis*, no. 2).

Since the ultimate norm of the religious life is the following of Christ as it is put before us in the Gospel, this must be taken by all institutes as the supreme rule” (*Perfectae Caritatis*, no. 2).

In the church, there is diversity of ministry but unity of mission (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 2).

Lay people’s right and duty to be apostles derives from their union with Christ their head. Inserted as they are in the mystical body of Christ by baptism and strengthened by the power of the holy Spirit in confirmation, it is by the Lord himself that they are assigned to the apostolate (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 2).

Following in the footsteps of the men and women who assisted Paul in the proclamation of the Gospel (see Acts 18:18-26; Rom 16:3), lay persons of a genuinely apostolic spirit supply the needs of their brothers and sisters and are a source of consolation to the pastors no less than to the rest of the faithful (see 1 Cor 16:17-18) (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 10).

The church on earth is by its very nature missionary since, according to the plan of the Father, it has its origin in the mission of the Son and the holy Spirit” (*Ad Gentes Divinitus*, no. 2).

The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, no. 1).

Before offering himself up as a spotless victim up the altar of the cross, he prayed to his Father for those who believe: ‘that all may be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; I pray that they may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me’ (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, no. 2).

Every renewal of the church essentially consists in an increase of fidelity to her own calling (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, no. 6).

Between those churches there is such a wonderful communion that this variety, so far from diminishing the Church's unity, rather serves to emphasize it. For the Catholic Church wishes the traditions of each particular church or rite to remain whole and entire, and it likewise wishes to adapt its own way of life to the various needs of time and place (*Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, no. 2).

All the members of the church should make a concerted effort to ensure that the media are utilized in the service of the many works of the apostolate without delay and as energetically as possible, where and when they are needed" (*Inter Mirifica*, no. 13).

Truth can impose itself on the human mind by the force of its own truth, which wins over the mind with both gentleness and power (*Dignitatis Humanae*, no. 1).

The council further declares that the right to religious freedom is based on the very dignity of the human person as known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself (*Dignitatis Humanae*, no. 2).

True education aims to give people a formation which is directed towards their final end and the good of that society to which they belong and in which, as adults, they will have their share of duties to perform (*Gravissimum Educationis*, no. 1).

The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. It has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from its own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men and women (*Nostra Aetate*, no. 2).

We cannot truly pray to God the Father of all if we treat any people as other than sisters and brothers, for all are created in God's image (*Nostra Aetate*, no. 5).

Therefore, the church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against people or any harassment of them on the basis of their race, color, condition in life or religion (*Nostra Aetate*, no. 5).

In every age, the church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, if it is to carry out its task (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 4).

What does the church think of humanity? What measures are to be recommended for building up society today? What is the ultimate meaning of human activity in the universe? These questions call for answers. From the answers it will be increasingly clear that the people of God, and the human race of which it forms part, are of service to each other; and the mission of the church will show itself to be supremely human by the very fact of being religious (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 11).

Genuine freedom is an exceptional sign of the image of God in humanity (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 17).

Believers can thus have more than a little to do with the rise of atheism. To the extent that they are careless about their instruction in the faith, or present its teaching falsely; or even fail in their religious, moral, or social life, they must be said to conceal rather than to reveal the true nature of God and of religion (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 19).

Today, there is an inescapable duty to make ourselves the neighbor of every individual, without exception, and to take positive steps to help a neighbor whom we encounter, whether that neighbor be an elderly person abandoned by everyone, a foreign worker who suffers the injustice of being despised, a refugee, an illegitimate child wrongly suffering for a sin of which the child is innocent, or a starving human being who awakens our conscience by calling to mind the words of Christ: “As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers or sisters, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40) (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 27).

But any kind 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 (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 29).

Thus the church, at once “a visible organization and a spiritual community,” travels the same journey as all of humanity and shares the same earthly lot with the world: it is to be a leaven and, as it were, the soul of human society in its renewal by Christ and transformation into the family of God (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 40).

The church, then, believes that through each of its members and its community as a whole it can help to make the human family and its history still more human (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 40).

To follow Christ the perfect human is to become more human oneself (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 41).

The intimate union of marriage, as a mutual giving of two persons, and the good of the children demand total fidelity from the spouses and require an unbreakable unity between them (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 49).

In their pilgrimage to the heavenly city Christians are to seek and value the things that are above; this involves not less, but greater commitment to working with everyone for the establishment of a more human world (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 57).

In the sphere of economics and social life, too, the dignity and vocation of the human person as well as the welfare of society as a whole have to be respected and fostered; for people are the source, the focus and the aim of all economic and social life (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 63).

To meet the requirements of justice and equity, every effort must be made, while respecting the rights of individuals and national characteristics, to put an end as soon as possible to the immense economic inequalities which exist in the world, which increase daily and which go hand and hand with individual and social discrimination (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 66).

The political community, then, exists for the common good: this is its full justification and meaning and the course of its specific and basic right to exist (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 74).

Peace is more than the absence of war: it cannot be reduced to the maintenance of a balance of power between opposing forces nor does it arise out of despotic dominion, but it is appropriately called “the effect of righteousness” (Is 32:17). It is the fruit of that right ordering of things with which the divine founder has invested human society and which must be brought about by humanity in its thirst for an ever more perfect reign of justice (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 78).

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 (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 92).