

GAUDIUM ET SPES:
REFLECTIONS ON DIALOGUE WITH CUBA

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On September 20, 2015, His Holiness Pope Francis followed in the footsteps of his two predecessors, St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI, and began a three day apostolic journey to Cuba, followed by an intensive pastoral visit to the United States of America. Upon his arrival in Havana, Francis stated:

Geographically, Cuba is an archipelago, facing all directions, with an extraordinary value as a “key” between north and south, east and west. Its natural vocation is to be a point of encounter for all peoples to join in friendship, as José Martí dreamed, “regardless of the languages of isthmuses and the barriers of oceans.”¹ Such was also the desire of Saint John Paul II, with his ardent appeal: “May Cuba, with all its magnificent potential, open itself to the world, and may the world open itself to Cuba.”²

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¹ *Pope Francis Arrives in Cuba, Encourages Reconciliation*, VATICAN RADIO, http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/09/19/pope_francis_arrives_in_cuba_encourages_reconciliation/1173133 (last visited Apr. 13, 2016) (quoting José Martí, *La Conferencia Monetaria de las Repúblicas de América*, in *OBRAS ESCOGIDAS II*, LA HABANA, 1992, 505).

² *Id.* (quoting Pope John Paul II, Address at the Welcome Ceremony during the Apostolic Journey of His Holiness John Paul II to Cuba (Jan. 21, 1998) *transcript available at* https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1998/january/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19980121_lahavana-arrival.html).

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These remarks, spoken in the presence of the President of Cuba, Raul Castro, were to be an indicator on the importance of “encounter” and “dialogue” that Francis would continue to reflect upon during his trip not only to Cuba, but also the United States of America at venues in Washington, D.C., New York and Philadelphia. During his pastoral visit Francis spoke not only to a Joint Session of Congress, but also the United Nations Assembly, where he quoted his predecessor Pope Paul VI who fifty years earlier spoke before the United Nations Organization in October 1965, remarking:

The hour has come when a pause, a moment of recollection, reflection, even of prayer, is absolutely needed so that we may think back over our common origin, our history, our common destiny. The appeal to the moral conscience of man has never been as necessary as it is today . . . For the danger comes neither from progress nor from science; if these are used well, they can help to solve a great number of the serious problems besetting mankind. Among other things, human genius, well applied, will surely help to meet the grave challenges of ecological deterioration and of exclusion . . . The real danger comes from man, who has at his disposal ever more powerful instruments that are as well fitted to bring about ruin as they are to achieve lofty conquests.³

It is the same Paul VI who only months after addressing world representatives at the United Nation promulgated the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World – Gaudium et Spes* on December 7, 1965.⁴

³ Pope Paul VI, Address to the United Nations Organization (Oct. 4, 1965) (transcript available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1965/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19651004_united-nations.html).

⁴ Pope Paul VI, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: Gaudium et Spes*, LIBRERIA EDITRICE VATICANA (Dec. 7, 1965) [hereinafter *Gaudium et Spes*].

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In the following few pages I wish to reflect in a particular way on the challenges of the promotion of the Gospel that beset Cuba, both within the country as well as on the part of those who are either exiled from Cuba or those who find themselves with a strong desire to help in the rebuilding and sustaining of the Church in Cuba.⁵ I believe strongly, that fifty years after its promulgation, *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* provides specific themes that can serve as a foundation in bringing about a common dialogue between the Church within and the Church outside Cuba, both of whom share in the hope of “a new evangelization” affirmed by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*:

The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew . . . I wish to encourage the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization marked by this joy, while pointing out new paths for the Church’s journey in years to come.⁶

A case in point of the desire for ongoing dialogue and building upon the tenets of *Gaudium et Spes*, is an initiative called “Conversations with Cuba” initiated by faculty at the University of Saint Thomas of Villanova located in Miami Gardens, Florida. What needs to be understood is that this University was born in exile out of the Universidad Católica de Santo Tomás de Villanueva founded in Havana on August 15, 1946, in Havana, Cuba by the Augustinian Fathers. In 1961, the Cuban government confiscated its property and

⁵ *La Iglesia Católica en Cuba Editado por la Oficina de Prensa Verdad y Esperanza, Comisión Central Preparatoria para la Visita del Papa*, CORAZONES.ORG, http://www.corazones.org/lugares/latino_a/cuba/doc_historia_cuba.htm (last visited July 29, 2016).

⁶ Pope Francis, *Papal Exhortation: Evangelii Gaudium*, LIBRERIA EDITRICE VATICANA ¶ 1 (Nov. 24, 2013).

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expelled the Augustinian Fathers. Very soon after arriving in Miami, former faculty opened Biscayne College in Miami Gardens, which earned university status in 1984, and which in 1988 came under the sponsorship of the Archdiocese of Miami.⁷

With the steady growth of the Cuban exile population who fled Cuba, due to government persecution and restrictions, both in the early 1960's and over the last fifty years,⁸ there has been an ongoing desire particularly with faculty and administration of St. Thomas University, as well as other local community leaders, to maintain a link with the Church in Cuba that has maintained its own ecclesial life often in the most difficult of times. It has been agreed upon by those who have begun the initiative called "Conversations with Cuba" that as an instrument of dialogue those involved must keep in mind that the Church in Cuba already exists and has existed for hundreds of years. Those who dwell outside of the Island are constantly challenged to reflect upon this point, and in the fervent desire to assist the Cuban Church there needs to be a constant recognition and reminder of this fact. For, the challenge will be that of a transformation within the culture itself. However, with this in mind there is currently a very large unbaptized as well as uncatechized population in Cuba that has been taught the Marxist philosophy that God does not exist and that man does not need religion. In fact, in December 1961, Fidel Castro declared on television, "I am a Marxist-Leninist and shall be one until the end of my life." He went on to say that, "Marxism or scientific socialism has become the revolutionary movement of the working class."⁹

⁷ *St. Thomas University History*, ST. THOMAS UNIVERSITY, <http://www.stu.edu/About-STU/University-History> (last visited July 29, 2016) (explaining that once the University status was attained, the name of the institution was changed to the current name to reflect its Cuban heritage).

⁸ *Cuban Migrants Flow Into South Florida at Highest Rate in 10 Years*, MIAMI HERALD, (Feb. 1, 2015), <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/cuba/article8913872.html> (last visited July 29, 2016) See also Geoffrey W. Hymans, *Outlawing the Use of Refugees As Tools of Foreign Policy*, 3 ILSA J. INT'L & COMP. L. 149, 152 (1996) (explaining the exodus of over 800,000 Cubans to the United States and the Cubans' opposition to the totalitarian regime of Fidel Castro).

⁹ JANE FRANKLIN, *CUBA AND THE UNITED STATES: A CHRONOLOGICAL*

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In search of a methodology of dialogue that initiatives such as “Conversations with Cuba” might use, the principles expressed in *Gaudium et Spes* are such that the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council first address common human questions that underscore the anthropological question of man’s reason for being. The ongoing struggle of each individual quest to make sense of his own life and the life of his community:

But what is man? About himself he has expressed, and continues to express, many divergent and even contradictory opinions. In these he often exalts himself as the absolute measure of all things or debases himself to the point of despair. The result is doubt and anxiety. The Church certainly understands these problems For Sacred Scripture teaches that man was created ‘to the image of God’ (Gen. 1:26) . . . by his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential . . . as we read elsewhere in Holy Scripture God saw ‘all that he had made, and it was very good’ (Gen. 1:31).¹⁰

From this understanding of the goodness of the individual, there emerges within the believer and the doubter the reality of good versus evil. “Though mankind is stricken with wonder at its own discoveries and its power, it often raises anxious questions about the current trend of the world, about the place and role of man in the universe, about the meaning of its individual and collective strivings, and about the ultimate destiny of reality and of humanity.”¹¹ The Church needs to read the signs of the times when renewing society by the message of the Gospel.¹² “Thus, in language intelligible to

HISTORY 46 (6th Printing, 2006).

¹⁰ *Gaudium et Spes*, *supra* note 4, at ¶ 12.

¹¹ *Id.* at ¶ 3.

¹² *Id.* at ¶ 4. See also Reverend Joseph W. Koterski, S.J., *The Use of*

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each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other.”¹³ Over fifty years ago, when Marxism became a way of life on the island of Cuba, through force, but often through no particular desire other than a human desire of wanting the basics of food, clothing, shelter and hoping that a new system of government might accomplish these necessities. *Gaudium et Spes* quotes Pope John XXIII by stating: “Every social group must take account of the needs and legitimate aspirations of other groups, and even of the general welfare of the entire human family.”¹⁴ Strongly stated then, it continues:

Therefore, there must be made available to all men everything necessary for leading a life truly human, such as food, clothing, and shelter; the right to choose a state of life freely and to found a family, the right to education, to employment, to a good reputation, to respect, to appropriate information, to activity in accord with the upright norm of one’s own conscience, to protection of privacy and rightful freedom even in matters religious . . . the social order and its development must invariably work to the benefit of the human person¹⁵

But what guarantee is there from any governmental structure -- be it Marxist, socialist, or even democratic -- that these rights will always and everywhere be protected? The encyclical asks the basic questions that the individual has asked for generations: “In the face of the modern development of the world . . . the number constantly swells of the people who raise the most basic questions or recognize

Philosophical Principles in Catholic Social Thought: The Case of Gaudium et Spes, 45 J. CATH. LEGAL STUD. 277, 288 (2006) (discussing the importance of these “signs of the times” in various areas of life).

¹³ *Gaudium et Spes*, *supra* note 4 at ¶ 4.

¹⁴ *Id.* at ¶ 26. Cf. John XXIII, encyclical letter *Mater et Magistra*: AAS 53 (1961).

¹⁵ *Id.*

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them with a new sharpness: what is man? What is this sense of sorrow, of evil, of death, which continues to exist despite so much progress?”¹⁶ The Church must continue to seek the truth as revealed in Scripture while

she strives to detect in the atheistic mind the hidden causes for the denial of God; conscious of how weighty are the questions which atheism raises, and motivated by love for all men, she believes these questions ought to be examined seriously and more profoundly The Church holds that the recognition of God is in no way hostile to man’s dignity, since this dignity is rooted and perfected in God.¹⁷

But even further, the encyclical does not fear to address the heart and the mind of the atheist: “The remedy which must be applied to atheism, however is to be sought in a proper presentation of the Church’s teaching . . . it is the function of the Church, led by the Holy Spirit . . . to make God the Father and His Incarnate Son present in a sense visible.”¹⁸

Moving forward the question arises, how is this Trinitarian understanding accomplished? “This result is achieved chiefly by the witness of a living and mature faith, namely, one trained to see difficulties clearly and to master them . . . This faith needs to prove its fruitfulness by penetrating the believer’s entire life, including its worldly dimensions, and by activating him toward justice and love, especially regarding the needy.”¹⁹ For “while rejecting atheism, root and branch, the Church sincerely professes that all men, believers and unbelievers alike, ought to work for the rightful betterment of this world in which all alike live; such an ideal cannot be realized,

¹⁶ *Id.* at ¶ 10.

¹⁷ *Id.* at ¶ 21.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Gaudium et Spes*, *supra* note 4, at ¶ 21.

however, apart from sincere and prudent dialogue.”²⁰ When this dialogue begins,

Christians are joined with the rest of men in search for truth, and for the genuine solution to the numerous problems which arise in the life of individuals from social relationships . . . the more right conscience holds sway, the more persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and strive to be guided by the objective norms of morality.²¹

But, the challenge in dialogue between believer and unbeliever can be complicated as “[c]onscience frequently errs from invincible ignorance without losing its dignity.”²² However, “the same cannot be said for a man who cares but little for truth and goodness, or for a conscience which by degrees grows practically sightless as a result of habitual sin.”²³ For in the end: “In the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light.”²⁴

Through a cooperation and discussion of cultural experience “when man gives himself to the various disciplines of philosophy, history and of mathematical and natural science, and when he cultivates the arts, he can do very much to elevate the human family to a more sublime understanding of truth, goodness, and beauty, and to the formation of considered opinions which have universal value.”²⁵ There is the possibility then that “the human spirit, being less subjected to material things, can be more easily drawn to the worship and contemplation of the Creator.”²⁶ By moving beyond just the physical, perhaps to a metaphysical or other philosophical

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ *Id.* at ¶ 16.

²² *Id.* See also Koterski, *supra* note 12 (explaining why human dignity should be respected).

²³ *Gaudium et Spes*, *supra* note 4, at ¶ 16.

²⁴ *Id.* at ¶ 22.

²⁵ *Id.* at ¶ 57.

²⁶ *Id.*

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understanding of the purpose and reason for life and its many realities, there can begin to be an awaking to an acceptance of the possibility of the Word of God, who has become flesh “in order to save all . . .” as ‘the true light which enlightens every man.’²⁷ This Incarnational reality can then find a home in the heart of even one who has been in doubt.

Even with the hope of a movement toward deeper understandings of the meaning of life, suffering, and death there can and probably will continue to be a dynamic whereby with the struggles of the common good in a pluralistic society will result in struggles with political ideology and the ideals of the Church. “The Church and the political community in their own fields are autonomous and independent from each other . . . both, under different titles, are devoted to the personal and social vocation of the same men.”²⁸

To initiate dialogue and in order to bring hearts and minds together that may not be of one accord, it is necessary that: “Respect and love ought to be extended also to those who think or act differently than we do in social, political and even religious matters . . . this love and good will, to be sure, must in no way render us indifferent to truth and goodness.”²⁹ Thus, in any conversation between the Church and state, or between those who live in Cuba and those who live in exile, “it is necessary to distinguish between error, which always merits repudiation, and the person in error, who never loses the dignity of being a person . . . God alone is the judge . . .”³⁰

In the search for dialogue, especially with the complex present-day Cuban culture, it is important to “make provision for men’s different needs, both in the fields of social life—such as food supplies, health, education, labor”³¹

²⁷ *Id.* quoting *John* 1:9-10.

²⁸ *Id.* at ¶ 76.

²⁹ *Gaudium et Spes*, *supra* note 4 at ¶ 28.

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ *Id.* at ¶ 84.

[For] these are the first efforts at laying the foundations on an international level for a community of all men to work for the solution to the serious problems of our times . . . the Church takes joy in the spirit of true brotherhood flourishing between Christians and non-Christians as it strives to make ever more strenuous efforts to relieve abundant misery.³²

These efforts are at the heart of making progress between the past and the present, the doubter and the believer, for “the Church stands forth as a sign of that brotherhood which allows honest dialogue and gives it vigor.”³³

Gaudium et Spes is very clear when it speaks not only the need for dialogue, but even with an understanding of any heart-wrenching history of persecution and suffering that good and faithful people have endured, it urges: “For our part, the desire for such dialogue, which can lead to truth through love alone, excludes no one, though an appropriate measure of prudence must undoubtedly be exercised.”³⁴ Not holding back, the Fathers of the Council state: “We include those who cultivate outstanding qualities of the human spirit, but do not yet acknowledge the Source of these qualities.” Which one could take to mean artists, poets, musicians, philosophers, and even those involved in the healing arts. But even more, the Fathers state: “We include [also] those who oppress the Church and harass her in manifold ways.”³⁵ For, “we can and we should work together without violence and deceit in order to build up the world in genuine peace.”³⁶

In conclusion, *Gaudium et Spes* helps to define dignity and the common good by providing a theological justification and

³² *Id.*

³³ *Id.* at ¶ 92.

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ *Gaudium et Spes*, *supra* note 4 at ¶ 92.

³⁶ *Id.*

explores questions that so much are a part of our times.³⁷ With the pastoral visits of Pope St. John Paul II (1998), Pope Benedict XVI (2012), and more recently Pope Francis in 2015, the political, cultural and religious life of Cuba has been challenged by both word and deed. How the government of Cuba as well as the governments of other countries respond to various calls from within and without is complicated and needs guidance and principle. Fifty years ago the Council Fathers of Vatican II noted strongly: “Today, the human race is involved in a new stage of history.”³⁸

For in man himself many elements wrestle with one another . . . in the face of modern development . . . people raise the most basic questions . . . with a new sharpness: what is man? What is this sense of sorrow, of evil, of death, which continues to exist despite so much progress . . . What can man offer to society, what can he expect from it? What follows earthly life?³⁹

But after the questions the Fathers conclude: “Hence under the light of Christ . . . the council wishes to speak to all men in order to shed light on the mystery of man and to cooperate in finding solution to the outstanding problems of our time.”⁴⁰

“Conversations with Cuba” is one of many attempts to bring lay and ecclesial communities in South Florida and Cuba together so as to promote trust, freedom, and understanding in an ongoing hope to establish “a universal brotherhood . . . in the ordinary circumstances of life.”⁴¹ *Gaudium et Spes* clearly points to the fact all dialogue between the world and the Church, must be ongoing and

³⁷ *Id.* See also MICHAEL G. LAWLER, TODD A. SALZMAN, & EILEEN BURKE-SULLIVAN, *THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD: GAUDIUM ET SPES THEN AND NOW* (2014).

³⁸ *Gaudium et Spes*, *supra* note 4, at ¶ 4.

³⁹ *Id.* at ¶ 10.

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ *Id.* at ¶ 38.

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open, and no matter where or when those conversations and actions take place, they must always be inspired by the Incarnate Son, whose fervent prayer was: “*ut unum sint . . .* that all may be one.”⁴²

⁴² *John* 17:11.