

## THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD

### *Vatican 11 document*

*(Published about 1964)*

*The future Pope John Paul 11 had a big input into this document*

The Church gazes on the world which is the theatre of man's history

Mankind today often raises anxious questions.  
What is the place and role of man in the Universe?  
What is the meaning of his individual and collective strivings?  
What is the destiny of man?

The Church wants to engage in conversation about these problems. The Church brings to mankind light kindled by the Gospel and puts at its disposal those saving resources which Jesus has to offer. It offers to mankind assistance in fostering the Brotherhood of all men. The Church's work is to carry forward the work of Christ under the lead of the Holy Spirit.

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### Hope and Anguish

The Church has the duty to present the Gospel and apply it to the condition of man in today's world. We must understand the world in which we live, its expectations, its longings.

Today there is a true social and cultural transformation. Never before has the human race enjoyed such an abundance of wealth, and economic power, yet hunger, poverty and illiteracy are still in the world.

Today there is a lot of talk about freedom yet new forms of social and psychological slavery make their appearance. There is the threat of Total War which would reduce the world to ashes. Many people today are kept from identifying permanent values - there is a general sense of uneasiness.

### **Profoundly changed conditions**

Intellectual formation is mostly based on mathematical and natural sciences and technology. There are also advances in biology, psychology and social sciences - population growth. The human race has passed from a more static concept of reality to a more dynamic evolutionary one.

There is also industrialization and urbanization, also a new and more efficient media of social communication which widens the simplest circulation of thoughts and feelings.

Psychological, moral and religious changes Accepted values are called into question. Youth become impatient. Institutions, laws and modes of thinking handed down from previous generations do not always seem to be well adapted to a contemporary state of affairs. Many people are abandoning religion. Many people are shaken.

### **The broader desire of Mankind**

Man is becoming convinced that he should develop a political social and economic order which will serve man and help him to develop the dignity proper to him. Women claim equality before the law with men. Many believe culture ought to be extended to everyone.

Man often "does what he would not and fails to do what he should". Hence he suffers from internal divisions and from this flow so many discords in society. Many people are blinded by materialism or the wretchedness of their situation and so they don't give the matter any thought. Many see their emancipation by the effort of humans alone. They

are convinced that the future role of man over the earth will satisfy every desire of his heart. Nevertheless many people are asking "what is man?" What is the sense of sorrow, evil, death? What follows this life?

### **THE IMPULSES OF SPIRIT DEMAND A RESPONSE**

The people of God believe that it is lead by the Spirit. It is able to decipher authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the happenings needs and desires of this age.

What does the Church think about man?

What is needful for the upbuilding of contemporary society?

What is the ultimate significance of human activity?

### **MAN AS MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE**

By his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential.

## **Sin**

Man abused his liberty and sought to find fulfilment apart from God. Man today finds he has inclinations towards evil. Man is split within himself - in him there is a dramatic struggle between good and evil, light and darkness. By himself he is incapable of overcoming evil effectively. But the Lord himself came to free and strengthen man renewing him inwardly and casting out the Prince of this world. For sin has diminished man, blocking his path to fulfilment.

## **The dignity of the Moral Conscience**

Man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself. Man has in his heart a law written by God - to obey it is the very dignity of man: according to it he will be judged. Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of man. There he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his depths.

## **The excellence of Liberty**

Only in freedom can man direct himself towards goodness. God has willed that man should seek his Creator spontaneously. Man acts according to a free choice. It does not result from blind internal impulses nor from mere external pressure. Before the judgement seat of God each man must render an

account of his own life whether he has done good or evil.

## **The mystery of Death**

It is the face of death that the riddle of human existence becomes most acute. Man abhors and repudiates the absolute ruin and total disappearance of his own person.

Man rebels against death because he bears within himself an eternal seed. Christ has won the victory over death, so faith in Christ provides the answer to the anxiety about what the future holds for him.

## **The forms and roots of Atheism**

Atheism must be accounted among one of the more serious problems of this age.

- God is expressly denied by some
- Man can assert absolutely nothing about him.
- No absolute Truth
- Everything can be explained by Scientific Reasoning
- Modern civilization is expressly engrossed in temporal affairs

Undeniably those who shut out God from their hearts and try to dodge religious questions are not following

the dictates of their consciences - hence they are not free of blame.

Believers themselves bear some responsibility for this situation. Some believers neglect their own training in the faith, teach erroneous Doctrine, or are deficient in their religious, moral or social life. They conceal rather than reveal the authentic face of God or religion.

### **Systematic Atheism**

Human independence as opposed to any kind of dependence on God Man's freedom is seen as an end in itself. God is superfluous. Man is lured away by the sense of power that he has created for himself.

### **The Church's attitude towards Atheism**

The Church has repudiated and cannot cease repudiating as firmly as possible those poisonous doctrines and actions which contradict reason and common experience of humanity. When a divine hope of eternal life is wanting man's dignity is most grievously lacerated.

### **Remedies for atheism**

1. Proper presentation of the Church's doctrine
2. The witness of a living, mature faith
3. Brotherly charity and unity

However Christians must enter into dialogue with Atheists. "one must never confuse error with the person who errs"

### **THE COMMUNITY OF MANKIND**

Interpersonal relationships demand a mutual respect for the full spiritual dignity of the person. All men are called to the same goal - namely God Himself. There is a certain likeness between the union of the divine persons and the Union of God's sons and daughters in truth and charity. But man cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.

### **Reverence and love for enemies**

Respect and love ought to be extended also to those who think or act differently than we do in social political or religious matters. The more deeply we come to understand their ways of thinking, the more easily will we be able to enter into dialogue with them. This love and goodwill must in no way render us indifferent to Truth and goodness. But it is necessary to distinguish between error and the

person who errs. God alone is the Judge and searcher of hearts.

Every type of discrimination whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, colour, social conditions, language or religion is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent.

Man is also in need of social life. Through his dealings with others, through reciprocal duties, through fraternal dialogue, he develops all his gifts and is able to rise to his destiny. But man's pride and selfishness also contaminates the social sphere. Man already born with a bent towards evil finds there new inducements to sin which cannot be overcome without strenuous efforts and the assistance of grace. The social order must be founded on Truth, built on justice and animated by Love.

### **Reverence for the human person**

Everyone must consider his every neighbour without exception as another self. Special obligation binds us to make ourselves the neighbour of actually every person and actively helping him when he comes across our path whether he be an old person abandoned by all, a foreign labourer, a refugee, a child born of an unlawful union wrongly suffering for a sin he did not commit.

### **The role of the Church in the Modern World**

The Church has a saving and an eschatological purpose which can be fully attained only in the age to come.

Modern man is on the road to a more thorough development of his own personality, and to a growing discovery and vindication of his own rights. Man will always yearn to know, what is the meaning of his life, of his activity and of his death.

The very presence of the Church recalls these problems to his mind. Only God who created man to His own image and ransomed him from Sin provides a fully adequate answer to these questions. The Church knows that only God whom she serves fully satisfied by what the world has to offer. The Church knows that man is constantly worked upon by God's Spirit and hence can never be altogether indifferent to the problems of religion.

The help which the Church strives to give to Society The Church can and should initiate activities on behalf of men particularly looking after the needy such as works of mercy and similar undertakings.

The promotion of UNITY belongs to the innermost nature of the Church. The Church urges humanity as

a whole to overcome all strife between nations and races in the family spirit of God's children.

They are wide of the mark who think that religion consists in acts of worship alone and in the discharge of certain moral obligations and who think that earthly affairs are divorced from religious life. The split between the faith and daily life deserved to be counted along the more serious errors of the age. Mother Church unceasingly exhorts her sons to purify and renew themselves so that the sign of Christ can shine more brightly on the face of the Church.

It is the task of the entire people of God to hear, distinguish and interpret the many voices of our age and to judge them in the light of the Divine Word.

## **CHRIST THE ALPHA AND OMEGA**

The Church has a single intention, that God's Kingdom may come, and that the Salvation of the whole human race may come to pass. The Lord is the goal of human history, the focal point of the longings of history and of civilization, the centre of the human race, the joy of every heart, the answer to all its yearnings.

They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks. One nation shall not

raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again.