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Reading *Gaudium et Spes* in the context of Economic Globalization

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The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Present World also called Gaudium et Spes, is the document of the Second Vatican Council that focuses on economic, social and political maters. It is considered the greatest expressions of Catholic social teaching in Church history. As we prepare to celebrate the 40 anniversary the document was officially promulgated, a new reading of the document under the present circumstances may be very insightful.

This paper reviews Gaudium et Spes in the perspective of the current Economic Globalization. The paper underlines those views that can be related to the current process of globalization and underscores those principles that may have an important impact on present globalization.

We discover that the teachings expressed in Gaudium et Spes have a great relevance in the present world. They are expressed in a language and with a perspective that in many cases seems to be tailor-made for the present circumstances.

Gaudium et Spes states five general principles regarding human beings, three derivated from the human being's own nature, Dignity, Freedom, Sociality; and two more of a relational quality: Superiority of the human person over things and Equality among human beings. After that GS goes more in depth to the social problems and sustains some more particular principles that may be very radical if applied to present socioeconomic imbalances. That is the case of the social concept of private property or the consideration of the human being as the ultimate goal of the whole social order. Concerning inequality, the document supports the ancient teaching that people are obliged to come to the relief of the poor and to do so not merely out of their

superfluous goods. It states that if one is in extreme necessity, he has the right to procure for himself what he needs out of the riches of others.

1. Introduction

The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Present World called Gaudium et Spes, is the document of the Second Vatican Council that focuses on economic, social and political matters. It is considered the greatest expression of Catholic social teaching in Church history. As we prepare to celebrate the 40 anniversary of the date the document was officially promulgated, it is interesting to review the document taking in account the circumstances of current economic globalization.

The celebration of the Council Vatican II was in itself an event that today we would not hesitate to qualify as a global event. Thousands of people in charge of the Catholic Church at the local level, coming from practically all the countries of the world at the time, and belonging to all kinds of cultures, met in the same building in sessions that lasted for several years, to discuss the future course of the most ancient institution of the world in a centuries old perspective. In this case the term global could very well not only include a trans-cultural or cross-geographical but also a trans-historical perspective.

2. World Context and Vatican II

At the beginning of the 1960's the world was inmersed in the middle of a Cold War, split into two ideological antagonistic blocks and with the threat of a new world war that might carry the complete destruction of human civilization.

Nobody could imagine the fall of the Communist Block, the abandon of Planned Economy, the hegemony of the Neoliberal Thought, as well as the worsening of the social exclusion and the economic unequalities.

Nevertheless, reading the document in the present circumstances we can appreciate the remarkable perspective of future of the Fathers of the Council. Gaudium et Spes (afterwards GS) in its initial considerations was already warning about "*Profound and rapid changes*" in the whole world and the emergence of makor contradictions between extreme misery and wealth, freedom and slavery, interdependence and individualism, etc. and the fragmentation of the human community in different sectors

that tended to confrontation. (GS 4)

This vision that fits so well to the present situation, makes the principles proclaimed by GS suited to confront the present day imbalances associated with globalization. We start then by reviewing its general principles on ethics and human beings.

3. General Considerations regarding Ethics and Human Beings

A. The dignity of the human person

For GS the dignity of the human person comes from the fact that we have been created to God's image and have been appointed by Him as master of the creation. Nevertheless this supremacy is not absolute and must be oriented to the purpose of God's glory. (GS 12)

Concerning the moral quality of human beings, we are good by nature, (GS 12) nevertheless we feel an inclination to evil, to rebel this orientation towards our last purpose (to give glory to God). This creates division and slavery. It is necessary for Christ to come to redeem us, to liberate it and to save humanity. (GS 13)

B. Human Freedom

Human freedom is affirmed although is not regarded ase something without a purpose. GS 17 states the need of freedom to orientate ourselves to the good. Conceiving human freedom is as "*a knowing and free choice that is personally motivated and prompted from within, not under blind internal impulse nor by mere external pressure."* (GS17)

D. The social nature of human beings

GS 12 states that a person "*by his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potentials*." (GS 12) So human being "*by its very nature stands completely in need of social life.*" (GS 25) This social life "*is not something added on to man;"* but something that helps *"to raise him to his destiny.*"

The GS 24 statements on human community have an unparalleled beauty, they talk about the unique human family and the spirit of brotherhood, the supreme mandate of

love, love of God and inseparably love of the neighbor, and about the ultimate horizon of human unity. "Man -it says- *cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.*" (GS 24)

Nevertheless the fathers of the Council know about the injustices and disorders that social life suffers, for "*they flow from man's pride and selfishness*." (GS25) They acknowledge the existence of some sort of structural sin and say that "*Man, already born with a bent toward evil, finds there new inducements to sin*." (GS25)

E. Common Good

GS defines common good as "*the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment*." (GS26)

The authors already had a global perspective of the common good. Noticing a process of growing interdependence they called "*universalization*" they conclude that rights and duties now must be also referred "*to the whole human race*."

They state that the human person's dignity and his rights and duties are universal and inviolable. This implies the recognition of some inalienable 'needs':

> "*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 religious matters.*" (GS 26)

The social order must work to the benefit of the human person and not contrariwise. This social order must be founded on truth, built on justice, animated by love and grow in freedom.

F. Respect for the human being

GS 27 is very clear on this matter and it goes deep to concrete details that we must not silence: "*Everyone must consider his every neighbor without exception as another*

self" and affirms that *"a special obligation binds us to make ourselves the neighbor of every person without exception, and of actively helping him when he comes across our path*." (GS 27) It *condemns* whatever is opposed to human life or the integrity of the human person. Also whatever insults human dignity, including "*subhuman living conditions, (...) disgraceful working conditions, and where men are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons*".

G. Basic equality of all human beings and social justic

GS 29 states the fundamental equality of "*all*" human beings and denounces any type of discrimination and excessive economic differences, as something unjust that does not respect this equality.

H. Human person as subject of rights and duties

In addition to their rights, persons have also obligations as a counterpart. Each individual has the obligations of justice and love and must contribute to the common good, according to his own abilities. GS also shows its global vision when it states that the more unified the world becomes, the more the duties of humanity extend beyond particular groups and spread by degrees to the whole world. *(GS 30)*

4. Considerations regarding human activity

A. Sense and purpose of human activity

In Holy Scriptures, man "*received a mandate to subject to himself the earth and all it contains, and to govern the world*" and relate himself and the totality of things to God So there is no rivalry between God and the achievements of man. (GS 33)

Temporary things have their autonomy in the sense that they "*enjoy their own laws and values*." (GS 36) The authentic purpose of human activity is not so much to accumulate wealth as its personal and social development.

B. Action of Christians in the world

The Council exhorts Christians to fulfill with loyalty their earthly responsibilities and reminds us that the "*split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age.*" Religion doesn't

"*consists in acts of worship alone and in the discharge of certain moral obligations*." (GS 43) Christians acknowledging the demands of faith must unhesitatingly put themselves into action to "*Christianize the world*" being witnesses of Christ. (GS 43)

5. Considerations regarding socio-economic life

A. Human dignity in the socio-economic life

The dignity of the human person must be respected and promoted in the socio-economic milieu. GS initiates this treatment of socio-economic life with a very clear affirmation: "*Man is the source, the center, and the purpose of all economic and social life*." (GS 63)

After the initial statement recognizes the positive contribution of economic activity and it's capability of meeting the increasing needs of a growing population. However at the same time it denounces an economicist set of values in the following way: "*Many people, especially in economically advanced areas, seem, as it were, to be ruled by economics, so that almost their entire personal and social life is penetrated with a certain economic way of thinking.*" (GS 63)

Forthwith, the document addresses socioeconomic inequality in very strong language. It signals the paradox of hastening the disparities in a moment in which the economy would allow to mitigate them. When it says that the poor who "*live in unworthy conditions*" have neither "*power of decision*" nor, therefore, "*possibility of initiative*" nor "*responsibility*" to change their situation it is pointing the responsibility of those who do have capacity of decision and initiative to change this situation.

In the view of the Council: "*The contrast between the economically more advanced countries and other countries is becoming more serious day by day, and the very peace of the world can be jeopardized thereby*." And it adds that: "*The ampler technical and economic possibilities which the world of today enjoys can and should correct this unhappy state of affairs.* (…) *Hence, many reforms in the socioeconomic realm and a change of mentality and attitude are required of all*" under the principles of "*justice and equity.*" (GS 23)

B. Service of man as the fundamental law of development

GS accepts as something necessary the increase of the production of goods and of the

rendering of services, "*for the purpose of making provision for the growth of population and of satisfying the increasing desires of the human race*." It encourages technical progress and economic development. But it warns that "t*he fundamental finality of this production is not the mere increase of products nor profit or control but rather the service of man.*" (GS 64) This is why, economic activity even if it "*is to be carried on according to its own methods and laws [,] must be subject to a moral order.*" (GS 64) Economy can not become a purpose in itself, but has to follow dictates from a moral authority in order to pursue its ultimate goals.

In any case GS declares itself as against any concentration of economic power in a few hands or nations and urges that "*at every level the largest possible number of people* [or in international affairs, nations] *have an active share in directing development.*" (GS 65)

In the present context of diffusion and prevalence of Economic Neoliberal thought, the following words specialy resonate:

> "*Growth is not to be left solely to a kind of mechanical course of the economic activity of individuals, nor to the authority of government. For this reason, doctrines which obstruct the necessary reforms under the guise of a false liberty, and those which subordinate the basic rights of individual persons and groups to the collective organization of production must be shown to be erroneous"*. (GS 65)

The Constitution leaves clear its position with regard to Socialist Planned Economy as well as Liberal Capitalism. In the latter case it denounces as a "false liberty" the leaving of economic activity completely to mechanical market performance without any type of regulations and vows for the introduction of regulations.

There is also a mention of the situation of the least developed countries. Given their urgent need to employ all of their resources, the Council declares against as the common good to hold back unproductive resources or to deprive the community of the aid that it needs. (GS 65)

In our understanding this applies also the phenomenon of capital evasion, where capital moves away from countries desesperately in need, and at best it is invested in places where there is fewer social need of it. The same could be said regarding the phenomenon of brain draining. Even if the Council safeguards the individual right to

economic migration, some objections could be formulated in the case of the common good and the reason to stem "brain drain" from the very countries most in need of their intellectual force.

C. Human Work and Leisure

GS holds a great appreciation of human work because it comes immediately from the person. Ordinarily by labor a man not only supports himself and his family, but *"is joined to his fellow men and serves them, and can exercise genuine charity and be a partner in the work of bringing divine creation to perfection.*" (GS 67)

Work is a duty and a right of every person. Society must help people to find sufficient employment and "*remuneration for labor is to be such that man may be furnished the means to cultivate worthily his own material, social, cultural, and spiritual life and that of his dependents, in view of the function and productiveness of each one, the conditions of the factory or workshop, and the common good.*" (GS 67)

As the Council says, "*It happens too often*, *however, even in our days, that workers are reduced to the level of being slaves to their own work. This is by no means justified by the so-called economic laws. The entire process of productive work, therefore, must be adapted to the needs of the person.*" (GS 67) Workers "*should also all enjoy sufficient rest and leisure to cultivate their familial, cultural, social and religious life*." (GS 67)

6. Considerations regarding inequality

A. Universal destination of Earthly goods

One of the most interesting parts of the document, the part that deals with private property. To begin with, GS 69 states clearly that everybody has "*the right of having a share of earthly goods sufficient for oneself and one's family.*" Nevertheless this right to property is not absolute:

> "*Earth with everything contained in it is for the use of all human beings and peoples. Thus, under the leadership of justice and in the company of charity, created goods should be in abundance for all in like manner. Whatever the forms of property may be, (...) attention must always be paid to this. In using them, therefore, man should regard the external things that he*

> *legitimately possesses not only as his own but also as common in the sense that they should be able to benefit not only him but also others.*" (GS 69)

The Council, remembering the aphorism of the Fathers "*Feed the man dying of hunger, because if you have not fed him, you have killed him*," teaches that "*men are obliged to come to the relief of the poor and to do so not merely out of their superfluous goods*."

"*Since there are so many people prostrate with hunger in the world*" GS urges all, both individuals and governments, to help those in need "*with the aid by which they may be able to help and develop themselves*" and asserts that "*If one is in extreme necessity, he has the right to procure for himself what he needs out of the riches of others*." (GS 69)

Universal destination of Earthly goods may serve in less developed societies as the criterion to accept or reject certain customs or traditions whereas in the developed ones it can also be a criterion for implementing the welfare state.

With regard to the extent of ownership of private property, GS believes that "*it is very important that the access of both individuals and communities to some ownership of external goods*." The Council is contrary to major differences in property but states that a certain degree of property is beneficial for the person and regarded it "*an extension of human freedom*" so authorities have to "*prevent anyone from abusing his private property to the detriment of the common good*." (GS 71)

<u>B. The enormous inequalities have to be eliminated</u>

GS emphasizes that it is necessary to make all efforts to "*remove as quickly as possible*" the immense economic inequalities which now exist, and in many cases are growing, and which are connected with individual and social discrimination. (GS 66)

Implementing this, it is not a question of only granting material aid but also of making the necessary institutional changes (e.g. international trade regulations) and promoting transfer of technology in order to let people from less advanced regions obtain a fair income

One of the phenomena derived from inequality is immigration. In this aspect GS establishes some basic principles in defense of immigrants who must be regarded as

persons, not as mere tools of production. Those principles such as no salary or work conditions discrimination, family reunion or social acceptance, does not lessen the need to creatively pursue employment creation in the places of origin. (GS 66)

C. Employment and Investment

Concerning employment, there is a general principle of providing "*sufficient and suitable work*" and professional formation for people, and the states: "*The livelihood and the human dignity especially of those who are in very difficult conditions because of illness or old age must be guaranteed*." (GS 66) This statement points to something qualitatively new. It is not just a matter of eliminating inequality. Saying that subsistence must be guaranteed to those who go through serious difficulties, it establishes a new principle for which no human being must remain without the means of subsistence and the necessary things to live with dignity.

When talking about investments, the Council relates them to employment: "*Investments, must be directed toward procuring employment and sufficient income for the people both now and in the future*." (GS 70) that is to say, investments have a social responsibility to the present in the form of employment and to the future in the form of sustainable development. Those in charge of investments decisions and of the economic organization have "*serious obligation*" to guard over these finalities.

D. Trade, International Cooperation and Foreign Aid

The text admits that wars come from injustices, especially from "*excessive economic inequalities*." (GS 83) It echoes the need of international cooperation (GS 85ss.) but also affirms that "*Developing nations will not be able to procure material assistance unless radical changes are made in the established procedures of modern world commerce*." (GS 85) Adding that: "I*f an authentic economic order is to be established on a world-wide basis, an end will have to be put to profiteering, to national ambitions, to the appetite for political supremacy, to militaristic calculations, and to machinations for the sake of spreading and imposing ideologies*."

Therefore GS believes in the necessity of deep changes, not only in the structures (structure of the world trade for exapmple) but also a change of attitude and motivations of people. It establishes that besides the normal commercial transactions "*Other aid should be provided as well by advanced nations in the form of gifts, loans or financial investments. Such help should be accorded with generosity and without*

greed on the one side, and received with complete honesty on the other side." (GS 85)

GS 86 also establishes some principles that must sustain any negotiation and cooperation with the poor countries, like the development of their productive capacities or receiving suitable benefits on their exports. In this perspective it contemplates international communities having to regulate and stimulate development and establish appropriate international institutions.

7. Conclusions

We divide our conclusions in two parts, the first one signals the general principles derived from the human beings own nature. In the second one we will underline the main guidelines that in consonance with the content of GS may be applied to the current economic globalization.

General Principles on the nature of human beings

We can see in GS three main principles to be observed that are derivated from the human being's own nature, *Dignity*, *Freedom*, *Sociality*; and two more relational principles: *Superiority* and *Equality*; Superiority of the human person over things and Equality among human beings.

Dignity means that human beings are created intrinsically good and require some minimal, material and spiritual conditions to be granted. Human freedom is one of them because is the means of personal realization. It is understood that the human being is not just an individual and society a mere sum of individuals. Sociality makes reference to a social dimension that impregnates anything concerning humans, its rights and duties, even if considered as individuals.

All the former five principles, *Common Good*, is the instrumental concept to be used. It is defined as the social condition that makes possible the perfection of groups and individuals. It is undergoing a process of globalization so rights and obligations now imply or affect the whole of mankind. *Justice* and *Equity* are the conditions for the Common Good.

Specific Principles for social and economic matters

We are going to summarize now some guidelines in consonance with GS that can be applied to the current economic globalization, taking into account that they reflect the position of Catholic the Church on the matter.

Service of human beings

The human being is the source, the center and the purpose of economic activity. Economic activity cannot become a purpose in itself. It has to accept some moral principles that orientate economic activity to its ultimate goal, that is human beings.

Economicist values

There is trend to make the entire personal and social life ruled by economics. This is condemned and denounced as the origin of many present imbalances.

Concentration of power

The accumulation of economic power in a few hands is also condemned as being against the principle of freedom, and also the source of injustice and inequality.

Economic regulations

There is no *invisible hand* for justice and equality. A kind of "*mechanical*" running of the economy may deliver the best material performance, but as far as production growth in itself is not a final goal, economic activity needs some regulation to protect justice and equality.

Private Property

Private Property is good because it helps self-realization of human beings, so it is a right to be defended for "all" people. But this *privatization* of property must not be understood as an absolute and unrelated to others. By the social nature of the human being, anything human, property as well, has a social dimension. We could talk about a "social responsibility" of property. One clear case of that is leaving resources unproductive when basic social needs are not yet fulfilled. Another case is extreme necessity; there is affirmed the right of people in extreme necessity whodon't receive help to procure for themselves what they need out of the riches of others.

Work

People must not be "*slaves*" of their work. On the contrary work and work conditions must be adapted to serve to the realization of the person.

Investments

There is a social responsibility of investments in the sense that "*must be directed toward procuring employment*" and regard present and future social living conditions.

Inequality

"*Enormous inequalities*" focuses the strongest wording of GS. There is an obligation to come to the relief of the poor and to do so not merely out of the one's own superfluous goods. Letting people dye of hunger without help is equated to killing them. Today with the enormous advances and technical possibilities there is a responsibility to eliminate poverty. This responsibility does not come from the poor themselves, as in many cases they have not the ability nor the power of decision to come out of their situation.

Overcoming this situation is indeed a matter of structural changes (trade regulations, intellectual property laws, and so on) but at the same time a change of heart it is needed, putting down greed, profiteering and ambitions. Developing an attitude of brotherhood in which "*every neighbor*" is regarded as another "*self*". I am aware that in our present world ravaged by violence, these may sound like quite unrealistic positions. But they may very well be the only way to make a real difference.

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