

THE CHURCH AND THE MODERN WORLD

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To begin to articulate the general principles concerning the relationship between the Church and the modern world, and why those principles are valid for that relationship beyond the 20th century, we must first depart by defining what the Church is and what is Her mission.



The Church is a mystery. The nature of the Church is not something that can be changed to satisfy the preferences of different people in diverse times and in numerous countries. The nature of the Church is expressed in Christ, Her Founder. The Church has a place in the modern world because She contains the truth, which the world so desperately needs. This is the foundation on which to build dialogue with the world.

In today's world, people are searching for the truth, but in all the wrong places. They go through all sorts of different venues, in order to arrive at the truth, but unfortunately none of them leads them to the fullness of truth, unless they go directly to the source, which is the Catholic Church. The Church places at the disposal of modern man all that She receives undeviatingly from Christ.

"The Church is essentially both human and divine, visible but endowed with invisible realities, zealous in action and dedicated to contemplation, present in the world, but as a pilgrim."¹

The Church is human and divine because its Founder, Jesus Christ is both human and divine. Through the Holy Spirit, Christ makes His Church One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic. These 4 are most typically known as the Four Marks of the Church. The Church is One because of its founder, Jesus Christ. Jesus founded One Church, not a thousand different denominations. Jesus came to reestablish harmony between His people, this is why He established only One Church, because He wants all of His children to be united into one flock, under one Shepherd (the Holy Father, the Pope, the Vicar of Christ on earth). Furthermore, we have eternally believed that the true Church of Christ is the Catholic Church, which was entrusted since the beginning to Saint Peter and the other apostles, and it is governed by the Holy Father and the Bishops in full communion with him.

The Church is Holy, because God who founded it is Holy. The Church is the Spouse of Christ. The Church is Holy, because She has been set apart for Christ for a special mission. Her mission is to bring salvation to all humanity, and to spread the message of the Gospel throughout all the earth. The Church is Catholic, which means it is universal, it is all over the world. Which also means, the Church is for all the people. And, even though, the members of the Church are not perfect, the Church will continue to be Holy, despite Her members, because She is the Bride of Christ.

The Church has a role everywhere and in every circumstance, even if some people may disagree with this reality. The Church has a moral obligation and a commitment to be present in all sectors of society. Her mission is to guide souls, protect Christ's teachings, and reveal God's Kingdom here on earth. The Church has a universal mission. The Church belongs to the whole world, no matter their culture, skin color, or language, etc.

The Church is Apostolic, because She was built upon the foundation of the Apostles who were chosen by Jesus, Himself, to go out into the world and be His witnesses of all they have seen and heard Him do.

Inspired by no earthly ambition, the Church seeks but a solitary goal: to carry forward the work of Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. And Christ entered this world to give witness to the truth, to rescue and not to sit in judgment, to serve and not to be served.²

Therefore, the mission of the Church is very clear. To teach and to proclaim the Christian message to the

entire universe, which is part of her evangelizing mission. In other words, the Church exists to evangelize. "The Church is a sheepfold whose one and indispensable door is Christ. It is a flock of which God Himself foretold He would be the shepherd."³

The Church is not just a building, although, in the past, it has rightly been called "the House of God". However, the Church is beyond a simple, beautiful edifice, the Church is constituted by its members. We are the ones who make up the Body of Christ, the Church. Therefore, the Church while on earth, desires to gather all her children (united into One Body of Christ), to be immersed in the fullness of truth, which is included without question in the Catholic Church. The function of the Church is also to disprove deceitful teachings. And, since the Church has the plenitude of the Truth, this is indeed easy to do, however, it is not exceedingly popular. The reason is simple, we live in a world, where the truth of Christ is not accepted wholeheartedly.

The Church is in the world but is not of this world. Therefore, to carry out her task in the most appropriate way, the Church has always had the moral obligation of analyzing the situation of men in the modern world. The Church is able to accomplish this important task with the utmost confidence because She is guided by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit dwells in the Church. Be that as it may, in order to relate to the world, the Church needs to understand the world in which we live today, which is not the same that it was a hundred, fifty, or sixty years ago. In other words, the Church needs to always be in the cutting-edge (advanced) with the accelerated changes developing in our modern world. We live in a fast-paced society, which demands so much from modern men, therefore, in order to keep up with the high-speed changes, the Church needs to have Her gaze fixed strongly on Christ, (who is the author of all). Continually considering that there are certain realities (Christian moral values) which do not ever change. For example, *the principle of truth and justice*. The Church has perpetually been the voice of the poor and the rich alike, (even more so of the poor) because the Church is aware of their basic needs, and knows that the rich can abundantly share what they have with the poor. There is no difference between rich and poor, all men are created equal. Therefore, the Church will continuously speak about the common good (which affects society as a whole) as the foundation for dialogue with the modern world. This is the reason why it is so important for the Church to enunciate regarding social justice issues.

"The Church encompasses with love all who are afflicted with human suffering and in the poor and afflicted sees the image of its poor and suffering Founder. It does all it can to relieve their need and in them it strives to serve Christ."⁴

In the past, the Socialist/Communist countries have tried (and many have) taken away the properties of the rich and give it to (according to them) the poorest of the poor, allowing the government to be the one to decide where these properties should be allocated and to whom should they belong. Undoubtedly, this goes against anything which the Catholic Church teaches, because it goes directly against social justice. Furthermore, concerning matters which directly affect (in a negative way) the common good of society, the Church cannot be silent.

"For, every man has by nature the right to possess property as his own".⁵

In other words, no one, not the government, not the state, not the constitutions of any particular country, not even individuals can take away from you what you have rightly worked so hard for. As an individual you have earned this property with your hard work and dedication, and God and the Church respect this accomplishment. This is the main reason why the Church does not get involve in politics (as far as belonging to any particular party), but it does get involve when the rights of her members are being violated, which is the case of communist/socialist countries. It is so sad to see how much of this is happening in our world today, so many people being deprived of their own properties (own possessions), their own basic necessities, and having to flee their countries due to government persecution against their God-right given freedom. For example, the Church's desire is that the poor should rise above their poverty (helped by the generosity of the rich) and better their condition of life. The Church, moreover, intervenes directly on behalf of the poor, by maintaining many associations which she knows to be efficient for the relief of poverty, such as Catholic Charities and Catholic Relief Services, which are worldwide organizations. They exist to help aid the poor countries.

"The fact that God has given the earth for the use and enjoyment of the whole human race can in no way be a bar to the owning of private property. For God has granted the earth to mankind in general, not in the sense that all without distinction can deal with it as they like,

but rather that no part of it was assigned to any one in particular, and that the limits of private possession have been left to be fixed by man's own industry, and by the laws of individual races".⁶

The dissertations of communist countries are so powerful and credible, that people actually believe their leaders, sensing that they have their best interests at heart, when, in reality what is actually happening is they are abusing their power and lying to the innocent people. This is continuous problem, which needs to be blocked at all costs. The Church has spoken over and over again about this issue, and will continue to do so until the end of times. This is why, (usually) in socialist/communist countries, the first ones to be expelled from their own countries are the members of the Catholic Church (specifically bishops, priests, religious sisters, etc). Anything or anyone representing the Catholic Church presents a personal threat to them.

"Blessed John Paul II, also known as the Pope of the Modern World condemned that system (communism) not merely on the relatively superficial ground that it was economically inefficient, but on the deeper ground that its atheism and determinism were incompatible with the fundamental truth of the dignity of the human person".⁷

In regards to *the principle of the dignity of the human person*, there are so many issues which the Church faces when it comes to Her relationship with the modern world, such as abortion, euthanasia and assisted suicide, which are merely indications of a concealed spiritual and moral unhealthiness, which Blessed John Paul II rightly called "the culture of death". How does the Church deal with these grave moral issues? First and foremost by speaking the Truth revealed in the person of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Redeemer.

The Church clearly calls these "abominable crimes" in *Gadium et Spes*. These attempts towards ending the dignity of the human person add greater urgency to the task of the Church in a world which is bombarded with lies (in order to perform these abhorrent acts). The Church will always defend human life at all costs, because life is sacred, and it belongs to God alone. And, the voice of the Church has continuously been perceived and will continue to be heard on these life threatening issues which are so deeply rooted in today's secularized world.

"According to John Paul II, the culture of death in this sense is characterized by patterns of thought that ultimately invite such attacks on human life by first devaluing it, or by obscuring its true dignity. Among such patterns of thought the pope was particularly concerned with the related ideas of a materialistic hedonism, an extreme individualism and a utilitarian morality. The culture of death, he claimed, is materialistic and hedonistic in that it teaches that the true goods of life are to be found in the enjoyments of the body. The elevation of such pleasures, however, inevitably downplays or even denies the importance of moral and sociable satisfactions, and therefore gives rise to certain individualism."⁸

The Church speaks for all those who suffer persecution, this includes the persecution of their own lives. Modern men has lost the true meaning of his life, and for that matter, the value of human life. Modern men has forgotten about God, and he has relied on his own strength and capabilities to become self-sufficient. Humanity has exceedingly abused its freedom, and has found no happiness whatsoever in doing so. This is why, men (in general) from the deepest parts of their hearts are searching for the truth, for everlasting happiness but if they genuinely searched for it, they will discover it in the Church, more specifically in the Most Holy Eucharist.

We live in a culture which influences us, whether we agree with it or not. No matter how hard we attempt to avoid it, society does have an influence on us (for better or for worse). This is the reason why now more than ever we need to live in the truth (which the Church offers to us). Otherwise, we are an easy prey to the radical secularism of our times (which usually results in the undermining of marriage and family).

Marriage being a strong foundation of society, and family being the fruit of marriage. This brings up the *next principle*, which is the *Sanctity of Marriage*.

"No human law can abolish the natural and original right of marriage, nor in any way limit the chief and principal purpose of marriage ordained by God's authority from the beginning: "Increase and multiply." Hence we have the family, the "society" of a man's house - a society very small, one must admit, but none the less a true society, and one older than any State.

Consequently, it has rights and duties peculiar to itself which are quite independent of the State".⁹

Therefore, the civil government should not attempt to exercise any rights over marriage or for that matter try to redefine what marriage is. God has created man and woman to be united into a holy matrimony to become One in Christ. And, this truth cannot be denied by any human being, or by any government, or by any other legal authority.

Marriage has already been defined by God, and this clearly sets a challenge for the Church of the 20th century and beyond, because the Church will always stand up for the truth and the sanctity of marriage. We live in a secularized world which lives as if God does not matter. Modern men is living as if sin did not exist, and if sin does not exist, (according to them) then God does not exist either, because Christ came to die for our sins in order to save us. But, the Church says quite the opposite: "God does matter", and "God does exist."

The Church has always upheld that marriage and family are the anchors (cornerstones) of having a healthy society, and will continue to do so until the end of times. This is a truth which cannot be denied, even if some disagree with this reality.

"Pope Leo XIII reiterated the Catholic doctrine of marriage, once again affirming its indissolubility, condemning divorce as one of the greatest of modern evils, and identifying the family as the foundation of society. He definitely affirmed that marriage, even more than it was a contract, was a free union based on mutual love, an understanding that had previously been considered a theological opinion".¹⁰

To speak about the Church and the Modern World, we must automatically speak about Blessed John Paul II and all the magnificent contributions He gave to the entire world through His clear teachings of the Church (specifically on the Documents of Vatican II). He is known as the Millennial Pope, and rightly so, because since 1979, He has written so many encyclicals directed to Catholics all over the world (on how to address the important issues facing us today in this millennium). He left us a beautiful legacy.

Just to name a few of his documents, which have had such an impact in our modern world, we can begin with *Evangelium Vitae*, (this is perhaps one of his most important encyclical) where He strongly testified the Church's opposition to abortion, euthanasia, and contraception. These are serious moral issues involving human lives.

The Church does her maximum to instill knowledge, direct, and educate humanity on these crucial issues. Needless to say, this encyclical was (and is) a preeminent challenge to today's modern world, because it lays out in a concrete manner the moral issues which Catholics and kindheartedness persons alike should abide by.

Other encyclicals include *Fides et Ratio* (on faith and reason), *Veritatis Splendor* (the Splendor of Truth), and many more. All of these documents are rendered to us by the Church. We have such an exquisite gift in each one of them, they are a real treasure to be shared with all. It is the truth explained in explicit ways, a truth so deeply desired by the modern world.

"The Church, now sojourning on earth as an exile, is necessary for salvation. Christ, present to us in His Body, which is the Church, is the one Mediator and the unique way of salvation. In explicit terms He Himself affirmed the necessity of faith and the necessity of the Church. Whosoever, therefore, knowing that the Catholic Church was made necessary by Christ, would refuse to enter or to remain in it, could not be saved."¹¹

In other words, we need the Church, whether we know it or not, or whether we accept it or not. Christ, Himself affirmed this reality. This is crucial to know (especially) for those who constantly attack the church's standpoint on so many different moral issues. The Church has a moral obligation to speak the truth, whether the world wants to hear it or not. The Church has a divine mission entrusted to Her by God, therefore, Her mission is unique.

By divine institution, the Church has a salvific mission in the entire world. Furthermore, when it comes to spreading the Good News of the Gospel, the Church does not exclude anyone. Christ came for all and established His Church here on earth for the entire world.

All of these principles are valid for the relationship between the Church beyond the 20th century, because the Church is ever new, and in order for Her message of salvation to be understood loud and clear all over the world, the Church needs to continue to expose the Truth in a concrete, effective, and powerful way (one that will touch the minds and hearts of the people in today's modern world). The Church can transform the world from within (with the help of the Holy Spirit). The aim of the Church is to engage people into a deeper intimacy with Christ.

These principles are only a few, there are many more which the Church confronts with on a daily basis. Granted, the Church needs to be (and is very much) alive (actively engaged) in today's world in all different areas. However, moving forward (beyond the 20th century), the Church is going to need more strength than ever, in order to perform Her specific mission triumphantly. The great news is that the One who guides the Church (His Bride) is Christ, therefore, there is nothing to fear. Jesus will never abandon His Church.

The Church will consistently be concerned with the interests of the modern world, and will invariably have a place in the world, because She holds the truth. Anything which affects the members of the Church will inevitably have an effect on the Church as well. The Church will repeatedly have to be educating the world on Christian morality, which is an issue which affects us all. Again, this is not what the world of today wants to listen to, but this does not mean that the Church is going to stop speaking the truth with which She has been empowered with.

Therefore, it is crucial for all of us to contribute to the welfare of the Church in this world and defend Her teachings at all costs. As members of the Church, we have the right and the moral obligation, in making sure the Church is advancing in bringing the Gospel of truth to all the ends of the earth, even to those countries which were once Christianized, but now seemed to have lost all hope. One of the major challenges facing us in today's world is overcoming despair. Man has lost all hope, but the Church has all the answers to all the human dilemmas of the human heart, and is the only one who can bring Christ to the world (to restore hope to all those who have lost it).

We must use all of our resources available to us (economical, technological advances, media communications, social connections, etc) in making sure the Church's mission is being accomplished to perfection. Christ deserves nothing less. The Church imbues us with the reality that we were made for more. Modern world has the capacity for more, not for less. Furthermore, our prayers will always be the most efficacious tool to help our Church.

Human suffering will always represent a challenge for the faith, for the Church in general. In a world which promotes hopelessness, where many of its members are living in depression (whether they have been diagnosed with it or not), the Church is the only solution to their problems. Only the Church can give them what they are looking for, the fullness of truth. And, only the Church can show the world the true love of God in the person of Jesus Christ who came and died for all of humanity.

Another fundamental challenge which faces the Church in this new century is the evangelization of the youth. This young generation is the future of the Church. The Church has already given the world the YouCat (Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church) as an excellent tool for all the young people to use as a guide for their daily lives. But it has also counted with the participation of millions in the World Youth Day Events in different parts of the world. Therefore, the Church is aware of the importance of evangelizing the youth, and is doing and will continue to do everything possible to keep the youth energized and alive for Christ and His Church. Christ holds a special place in His heart for the youth.

The Church will keep igniting the fire of the faith by sharing the mysteries of Christ and by forming authentic witnesses. Modern man will listen and will be more touched by the example of true witnesses of Christ, than it would by reading some books. Catholic Christians must make choices that are coherent with their faith. Modern man has to come to an understanding that God has not created us for the temporal things in this life, but for the eternal Kingdom in heaven.

The world of today is living in a profound crisis of faith, and if the Church does not intervene (by proclaiming God's truth), this century will be in a more chaotic state than the one it's already in. One of the greatest challenges for the Church today is how to present the truth of the Gospel in a manner which convinces the most hardened hearts, and there is only one way to do this, by trusting in God's Merciful Love (in the most Holy Eucharist). He is the One who guides the Church, He is the One to follow, He is the Truth, the Life, and the Way. The only One who can transform people's lives is Christ. The Church is nothing more than the

transmitter of the faith by the Mission entrusted to Her by God. But the One (who is ultimately) the life-changer is the Holy Spirit.

The Church will always be in the world, and Her universal mission will last until the end of times. It can be said, that it is a twofold mission, to spread God's message of salvation to all the world by speaking the saving truth of Christ on the one hand, and to bring as many souls as possible back to the fullness of Christ's truth, which is only found in His Church.

The Church will always seek for the common good of all the members of a society, and protect the integrity of the human person at all costs. The Church zealously guards God's Word and educates her children on how to live moral lives. The Church desires to teach modern men all the moral principles, they have lost.

Modern man has made great progress in the different fields, such as science, bioethics, even in abominable discoveries such as cloning, and embryonic stem cell research, which are reprehensible in God's eyes. But nothing really matters to man, if He forgets His Creator. Modern men must come to the awareness that without God, he is nothing. The Church has a perpetual saving mission, it communicates Christ's life to the world, it elevates the dignity of the human person, and speaks the truth at all times.

"The Church truly knows that only God, Whom she serves, meets the deepest longings of the human heart, which is never fully satisfied by what this world has to offer."¹²

The Church believes she can contribute greatly towards making this world more human, more loving. The Church will always proclaim the rights of man. The Church recognizes all the good the modern world has to offer, but at the same time, it directs where and how those goods are to be utilized for the common good of all. When the Church speaks, She does not speak on her behalf, She speaks on our behalf. Because of her universality, the Church can fulfill her salvific mission with more freedom. When you speak the truth, you have nothing to fear.

As the Pastoral Constitution on the Church and the Modern World '*Gadium et Spes*' states so clearly: "the Church herself knows how richly she has profited by the history and development of humanity." In other words, the Church is aware of all the great things the world of today can offer, but as a Mother, She must warn her children that "all that glitters is not gold", which means have your eyes fixed on God alone, not on the temporary things which will pass away. Seek for the heavenly things which are eternal, those are the ones which will make you truly happy. If human society is to be healed, it needs to be healed by Christ, by accepting His precepts, His laws, and His values.

In conclusion, the Catholic Church has always taught us that some principles are non-negotiable, such as the Dignity and Sacredness of human life (every life is precious to God). The modern world of today will only be healthy if everyone's human rights are respected and protected. Another non-negotiable is the preference for the poor and the most vulnerable. The Church will always stand up for them, and speak on the behalf of all those who do not have a voice in the world, and if they do, it is not been heard.

The Church calls all nations to build successful economies for the common good, by always respecting the dignity of their workers, and not using them as their working slaves. Human labor must be recognized and respected. It appears that today, marriage seems to be an specific issue of controversy, therefore, we must steadfastly promote in our society, the forgotten Christian moral values, by fostering healthy, holy marriages. It will be the equivalent of going against the current, but God will give us the necessary graces to achieve it.

The Gospel of Christ which has been entrusted to the Church shares the truth about the freedom of the human person. But this freedom is not to be abused, but rather, exercised properly by living as true sons and daughters of God. The Church attempts to guide the faithful with the truth which she possesses given to Her by Jesus Christ Himself. The key is finding out how should the Church relate to modern thoughts and ideas, without jeopardizing this truth. Just like in the past, the Church has always related to the modern world (also known as the contemporary world) with the truth of the Gospel. Perhaps it is a truth which many may or may not want to hear, but the Church still has the responsibility to proclaim it. There are so many things that make this modern world different than the world which preceded it. But, the Church is always up to the challenge.

Furthermore, because the Church has such a distinct power of her own, She is able to reach in a powerful way the hearts of all men and lead them ever closer to Christ. And, this is the ultimate aim of the Catholic

Church in the modern world.

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (New York, Doubleday Publishing Group, 1995), #771

² Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium Et Spes* (7, December, 1965), #3 in *the Basic Sixteen Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (New York: Costello Publishing Company, Inc., 1996), 165

³ http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html#6

⁴ http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html#8

⁵ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum_en.html#6

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⁷ Holloway, Carson, Article: *John Paul the II: The Friend of the Modern World*

<http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2011/05/09/3211299.htm>

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⁹ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum_en.html#12

¹⁰ Hitchcock, James, *History of the Catholic Church, from the Apostolic Age to the Third Millenium* (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2012) Pg. 358

¹¹ http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html#14

¹² Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium Et Spes* (7, December, 1965), # 41 in *the Basic Sixteen Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (New York: Costello Publishing Company, Inc., 1996), 208

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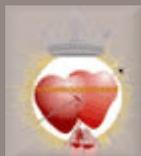
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