

## VATICAN II: *GAUDIUM ET SPES*: 50 YEARS LATER

Fausto Gómez\*

### ABSTRACT

From a reason-faith perspective, I reflect on “Vatican II: *Gaudium et Spes* Fifty Years Later.” In the introduction, I speak briefly on the Second Vatican Council, and on its Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (“Joy and Hope”) and its ethical and social teachings.

### INTRODUCTION

As we Christians commemorate the Fiftieth Anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, or Vatican II (1962-1965), we realize that this Council is still important and relevant today for all Christians and also for the men and women of our world. We are still in the Post-Vatican II stage, or the stage of reception. The conciliar documents continue having a great influence in the faith, catechesis and charity of the Church, the community of disciples. They are still significant for the ongoing renewal of the Church after the first decade of the new millennium. Benedict XVI says that this renewal, to be well grounded, has to be based also on the documents of the Council. The Christians then need to return “to the ‘letter’ of the Council.”<sup>1</sup>

The commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Vatican II entails then a renewed commitment to re-study its Pastoral Constitution and make a sort of equivalent translation fifty years later. Considering that the Church is also celebrating in this Year of Faith (2012-2013) the twentieth anniversary of the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992, first edition), I shall also refer often to its teachings on ethics and social ethics.

Vatican II issued *sixteen documents*: four Constitutions, nine Decrees and three Declarations. *Gaudium et Spes*, GS is the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the

---

\* Fausto Gómez Berlana, O.P. is professor emeritus at the University of Saint Joseph in Macau, China, and professor at the University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Philippines. He is a member of the Pontifical Academy for Life, the Society of Catholic Social Scientists, and the Editorial Board of the (USA) National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly.

<sup>1</sup> Benedict XVI, “Homily of the Holy Mass for the Opening the Year of Faith,” Vatican City, October 11, 2012, accessed June 30, 2013, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedictxvi/homilies/2012/documents/hf\\_benxvi\\_hom2012011\\_anno-fede\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedictxvi/homilies/2012/documents/hf_benxvi_hom2012011_anno-fede_en.html). See also Benedict XVI, *Motu Proprio for the Indiction of the Year of Faith Porta Fidei* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2012). For the documents of Vatican II and of the Popes and other Catholic sources, you may go to [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

Modern World and one of the four Constitutions, which are the basic doctrinal documents of Vatican II.<sup>2</sup>

Fifty years ago Vatican II spoke of the “real social and cultural transformation” of the world (GS 4, §2). We live in a post-modern, globalized world that is not divided anymore between two blocks of power but permeated by a new brand of capitalism, by individualism, consumerism, secularism, relativism, fundamentalism, aggressive atheism, continuing violence and injustice, renewed persecution of Christians, etc. In this partly old and partly new social and cultural context, *may the Pastoral Constitution of the Second Vatican Council continue guiding Christians and other persons of good will towards positive ethical change and pertinent social action?*

*Gaudium et Spes* is the longest conciliar document and the most quoted since its publication nearly fifty years ago. Promulgated by Paul VI on December 7, 1965, it is a document addressed not only to Catholics but to the whole humanity as well (GS 2, §1).

The *journey* of the final text of the Pastoral Constitution began before the third session of the Council (in 1964). It was known first as “*Schema 17*,” later on as “*Schema 13*.” In the third session the draft prepared by moralist Bernard Häring was discussed and hotly debated by the Council fathers.

The *theological method* used was inspired by theologian Marie-Dominique Chenu, an expert in the Council. It is the three-stage method, later on called the pastoral circle or pastoral spiral method: first stage, social analysis (see the situation); second, faith evaluation (judge or discern theologically the social situation), and third, act (pastoral action to improve the situation). Its arguments from reason and faith are grounded on natural law and the evangelical law respectively (cf. GS 74 and 89).

The main *sources* of the social doctrine of GS, of the whole magisterial teaching are Tradition, Revelation and also, particularly in GS, human experience (GS 46, §1). Our more immediate sources are all the documents of Vatican II, in particular the other three Constitutions, namely the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, DV, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, LG, and the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, SC. GS connects

---

<sup>2</sup> In the main text of this study I shall place in parenthesis the respective quotes from and references to the documents of the Church: first quote, the whole name in Latin, e.g. *Gaudium et Spes*, and thereafter, only the initials of the respective magisterial document, GS. To the quotes or references from the Pastoral Constitution, we usually add the corresponding paragraph. Similarly I shall do with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, CCC. Regarding GS, usually I use the English translation of the edition by Austin Flannery, OP, *The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Vol. I (Philippine Edition, Pasay City: Paulines Publishing House, 7<sup>th</sup> Printing 2001), 903-1001. Concerning the edition of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, CCC, I use the edition published by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) (Makati, Metro Manila: Word and Life Publications, 1994). By the way, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC, 2004) refers to the Pastoral Constitution about 168 times.

with the previous documents of the social doctrine of the Church (Pre-Vatican II stage) and is (Vatican II stage) a point of reference and departure for the following social documents (Post-Vatican II stage) (cf. Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, PP, 1967, 13; John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, SRS, 1987, 3; Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, CV, 2009, 12). The Vatican II stage inaugurates a new approach to the social doctrine of the Church: a more existential, dynamic, dialogical and evangelical approach.

The central *content* of GS is the basic principles and values of a Christian morality closely linked to spirituality, and particularly of the social doctrine of the Church – of the social Gospel of Jesus. The Pastoral Constitution is considered a compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church. It is, furthermore, the Vatican II document “with the deepest ethical content,” and the fundamental conciliar text for the renewal of theological and social ethics. Understandably, when GS speaks of ethics and of social ethics it does so principally from a faith perspective. Its teaching is not just philosophical ethics but also theological ethics, and therefore with a clear reference “to man’s eternal destiny” (GS 51, §4, and 40, §2), or in the perspective of the final end.<sup>3</sup>

*Gaudium et Spes* is divided into two parts. The *First Part*, on fundamental theological ethics, is more doctrinal, and therefore permanent, while the *Second Part*, on specific ethical issues, is more practical, and contingent.<sup>4</sup>

In our study, we focus on the central theme of GS, namely, (1) a Christian anthropology, and (2) on the concrete themes of justice, charity and peace, (3) the option for the poor, (4) the defence and promotion of human life, and (5) the need of change, through conversion, witnessing and prayer. We shall (6) conclude our reflection with some more evaluating comments.

---

<sup>3</sup> Among the many texts I have read or re-read in preparing this article on GS, I wish to enumerate the following that have helped me in a special way: Marciano Vidal, “*Gaudium et spes* y teología moral. A los 50 años del concilio Vaticano II,” *Moralia* XXXV, no. 134-135 (Abril-Septiembre, 2012): 103-153; Cardenal Ángel Herrera Oria, ed., *Comentario a la constitución Gaudium et spes sobre la Iglesia en el mundo actual* (Madrid: BAC, 1968); Herbert Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Vol. V: *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (New York/London: Herder and Herder/Burns and Oates, 1969); René Latourelle, ed., *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives Twenty-five Years After (1962-1987)*, Vol. 2 (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989), 402-459; Jesús Espeja, *A los 50 años del Concilio Camino abierto para el siglo XXI* (Madrid: San Pablo, 2012); David Hollenbach, S.J., “Commentary on *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World),” in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries & Interpretations*, ed. Kenneth B. Himes, OFM (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005), 266-290. See also Yves Congar O.P., *My Journal of the Council*, translated from the French by Mary John Ronayne OP and Mary Cecily Boulding O.P., English translation editor Denis Minns OP, (Adelaide: ATF Theology, 2012). French Original, *Mon Journal du Concile*, I et II (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, *Explanatory Footnote* (after title): in A. Flannery’s edition, 903n1; R. Gallagher, “The Significance of a Note: The Implications of *Gaudium et Spes* for the Fundamental Moral Theology,” *Studia Moralia* 42/2 (2004): 451-463.

The first question the writer faces is: What is the nature, the dignity of the human person according to GS as read today?

## NATURE OF THE HUMAN PERSON

In the first section of our study of GS, we shall focus on the following points: mission of the Church and signs of the times; Christian humanism, and the dignity of the human person.

## THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH AND THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

The mission of the Church springs from the Trinitarian mission of God: from the Father, who is the beginning and end of all things (GS 92, §5), through the Son Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit (cf. GS 24, §2) who works in every person, who enlightens every man and woman and calls them to obey the law written in their hearts (cf. GS 15-16, 22).

The mission of the Church in the world (cf. GS 40-45) is Christ's mission of salvation and liberation. The Church is committed "to bear witness to the truth, to save and not to judge, to serve and not to be served" (GS 3, §2; cf. Jn 3:17). The purpose of the involvement of the Church in the world is "to carry on the work of Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit" (GS 3, §2). Grounded upon the ecclesiology of communion of Vatican II, the Church loves the world, tries hard to understand it and to contribute with others to its improvement.<sup>5</sup>

The mission of the Church, universal sacrament of salvation (LG 48; GS 45, §1) is not just humanization but divinization as well: To offer the Gospel of salvation to all (cf. Vatican II, *Ad Gentes*, AG 5; Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, EN, 1975, 14); to transform the human family into the family of God's children (GS 40, §2), and to proclaim a new earth and a new heaven (GS 39).

The mission of the Church is directly religious and indirectly social: "The mission Christ entrusted to the Church is not political, economic or social, but religious" (GS 42, §2), and truly humanizing: "The mission of the Church will show itself to be supremely human by the very fact of being religious" (GS 11, §3). The Church, therefore, is not identified with any political community or bound to any political system or a particular culture. She is free and thus may unite all peoples and nations (GS 76, §2). She offers herself to the service of all men and women and to all peoples

---

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Rafael González Moralejo, "Misión de la Iglesia en el mundo actual," in *Comentarios a la Constitución Gaudium et spes. Sobre la Iglesia en el mundo actual*, ed. Ángel Herrera Oria (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1968), 337-404; Jesús Espeja, *A los 50 años del Concilio*, 136; Marciano Vidal, "Gaudium et spes y teología moral," 120-122.

“under any regime that recognizes the basic rights of the person and the family, and the needs of the common good” (GS 42, §5).

The Church’s mission or duty in society is “to preach the faith, to proclaim its teachings about society, to carry out its task without hindrance, and to pass moral judgment even in matters relating to politics, whenever the fundamental rights of man or the salvation of souls require it” (GS, 76, §5). The Church, moreover, is entitled – like other social groups – to preach with freedom the truths of the Gospel and of human activities (cf. GS 76, §3).

Her mission is *evangelization*; an evangelization that – to be relevant today – must be dialogical and inculturated (cf. Vatican II, AG 22; Paul VI, EN 20; John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, RM, 1990, 52-54).

*Temporal realities*, Vatican II teaches, are ordered to the integral vocation of man, ultimately to God through Christ who holds the primacy over all (cf. Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, AA 7). Underlining the autonomy of temporal activities (GS 36), the Council notes that these need purification for as extensions of men are also permeated by sin. True human autonomy, however, cannot be opposed to God: the creature depends upon his Creator, who is also “the conserver of all things.” The sciences and humanities ought not disregard ethical values and discard faith: true science “can never conflict with faith” (GS 36; cf. GS 37). Science and technology are improving the lives of persons and peoples. However, science and technology without an ethical dimension end up in the scientific and technocratic ideology (cf. CV 70).

To achieve her mission of service, it is the responsibility of the Church to read and interpret the *signs of the times* (GS 4, §1), to dialogue with the whole humanity (GS 3, §1; cf. Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, ES, 1966).

The mission of the Church in the world demands “prudent and sincere dialogue” (GS 21, § 2). It is important to note that in the dialogue between the Church and the world, the Church not only gives to the world, for she also receives and profits from her dialogue with the world: from the world’s cultures, languages, philosophies and sciences. We read in GS: “Whatever contributes to the development of the community of mankind on the levels of family, culture, economic and social life, and national and international politics, according to the plan of God, is also contributing in no small way to the community of the Church insofar as it depends on things outside itself” (GS 44, §2).

The Church takes special care in promoting *dialogue* with other religions and cultures (GS 22; Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, NA 1; LG 16; DH 3).<sup>6</sup> The Church’s

---

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, FABC, “Evangelization in Modern Day Asia” (Taipei, Taiwan: 1974), no. 12; Felix Wilfred, “Recepción del Vaticano II en un continente multirreligioso,” *Concilium* 346: *Vaticano II 50 años después* (Junio 2012): 143-150; Avery Dulles, SJ, “Vatican II Reform: The Basic Principles,” *FABC Papers No. 117: The Second Vatican Council and the Church in Asia: Readings and Reflections* (Hong Kong: FABC, 2005), 39-52; Peter C. Phan, “Reception of Vatican II in Asia. Historical and Theological Perspectives,” *FABC Papers* 117, 107-127.

teaching on interreligious dialogue, as underlined after Vatican II, is necessarily linked to proclamation, which is more important than condemnation (cf. John Paul II, *SRS*, 41). In our context, fifty years after the opening of Vatican II, GS also recommends dialogue with the new culture created by the development of science and technology (cf. GS 44, § 2).

“*Signs of the times*” is connected with the theology of “*kairos*” and represents a new approach to the social reality. Yesterday and today “the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel” (GS 4, §1; cf. GS 11, 44 and 46). Jesus told the Pharisees that they did not know how to read and interpret the signs of the times (cf. Mt 16:3). Reading the signs of the times entails reading the voice of God in the voices of the times: *Voce temporis voces Dei audire*. With its teachings on “the signs of the times,” *Gaudium et Spes* takes account of the cultural milieu and appeals to the places and commitments that are messengers of the Word of God, such as the increasing thirst for spirituality (for God), the search for the ultimate meaning of life, the promotion of human dignity and rights, the growing solidarity among peoples and movements, the universal longing for peace, ecological awareness and responsibility, the reality and needs of migrants, etc.

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRISTIAN HUMANISM

The Pastoral Constitution is considered the *magna carta* of Christian humanism. GS stresses the need of a new humanism (GS 55; cf. GS 1, §1), of a new Christian humanism, which is grounded on the nature, dignity and rights of man, perfected in Christ, and ordered to union with God. It defends the principles and values of social ethics in its human dimension – from reason – and in its Christian dimension – from reason and faith (cf. GS 74 and 89). The arguments of reason are directed to “the whole humanity,” to all men and women (GS 2). They are rooted in natural law or the law of being human (GS 79, §2), which is the universal moral law, “the voice and the revelation of God in the languages of all creatures” (GS 36, §2).

The anthropology of GS – of Vatican II – is theological anthropology: To know man fully, we need to know God; to know God fully we need to know man.<sup>7</sup> It is, moreover, centrally Christological anthropology.

---

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Paul VI, “Speech for the Promulgation of GS,” December 7, 1965; John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, *RH*, 1979; Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 2009, nos. 18-19, 75-79. See Luis Ladaria, S.J., “Humanity in the Light of Christ in the Second Vatican Council,” in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives Twenty-five Years After (1962-1987)*, Vol. 2, ed. René Latourelle (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 386-401; Luigi M. Rulla, S.J., Franco Imoda and Sister Joyce Riddick, S.S.C., “Anthropology of the Christian Vocation, Conciliar and Post Conciliar Aspects,” in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives*, Vol. 2, ed. René Latourelle, 402-459; Carlos Santamaría Ansa, “Situación del hombre en el mundo,” in *Comentarios a la constitución Gaudium et Spes*, ed. Ángel Herrera Oria, 173-196.



The Christological anthropology of GS is present in every chapter of the first part: Christ is the key to understand the mystery of the human person (chapter 1); the social nature of man (chapter 2); man's activity in the world (chapter 3); and the mission of the Church in the modern world (chapter 4). Christ is the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15), the perfect man (GS 22, §2), the one who died for all men and women and rose from the dead and lives (GS 10, §2, and 22). Christ is "the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Rev 22:12-13; GS 45, §3). He is "the head and exemplar of that renewed humanity... to which all men aspire" (AG 8). The mystery of life may be unveiled by Jesus Christ, who asks his followers "to treat one another as brothers" (GS 32, §3; NA 5). And by dying he showed us that the meaning of life is indeed the donation of oneself in the service of others (GS 24, §2; cf. GS 41, §1).<sup>8</sup>

We Christians firmly believe that in Jesus, Lord and Master, "the key, the center and the purpose of all of man's history is to be found" (GS 10, §2). We Christians also believe that Christ's grace is invisibly acting through the Holy Spirit in all men and women of good will (cf. GS 22, §5; LG 16; John Paul II, 13).<sup>9</sup>

Human beings through the ages ask for the meaning of their life, the nature of their humanity. *Gaudium et Spes* asks: What is the meaning of this life and of the life to come? (GS 4, §1) What is man? What is the meaning of suffering, evil and death, which have not been eliminated by progress? (GS 10, §1; GS 12, §2) In GS, the Church offers herself to help man search for "the meaning of life, his actions and of his death" (GS 41, §1). Without God, however, "the problems of life and death, of guilt and of suffering remain unsolved, so that men are not rarely cast into despair" (GS 21, §3).<sup>10</sup>

The human person is a mystery that continues asking through the ages: *Who am I?* The human being is a mystery that can only be fully revealed – we Christians believe – in Jesus Christ, the perfect man. In the most quoted number of all the texts

---

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Alan Schreck, *The Catholic Challenge. A Fresh Look at the Message of Vatican II* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1991), 57; whole article on GS, pp. 89-112; Marciano Vidal, "Gaudium et spes y teología moral," 113-114; Pedro Trigo, "O caminho de humanização passa pela afirmação dos seres humanos: A celebração, uma oportunidade para retomar o caminho," *Perspectiva Teológica, Belo Horizonte* 123 (Mai-Ago 2012): 181-216. For a critical note on the anthropology of Vatican II, cf. Giuseppe Ruggieri, "El Vaticano II como Iglesia 'en Acto'," *Concilium* 346: *Vaticano II 50 años después* (Junio 2012): 355-357.

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed theological explanation of GS 22, see Luis Ladaria, S.J., "Humanity in the Light of Christ, in the Second Vatican Council," in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives*, Vol. 2, ed. René Latourelle, 392 & ff.

<sup>10</sup> In his Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, Benedict XVI points out that there are many people today who while not believing in God are searching for the ultimate meaning of life, and that this search is a search for God. He writes: "This search is an authentic 'preamble' to the faith, because it guides people onto the path that leads to the mystery of God" (*Porta Fidei*, 10). Cf. Fausto B. Gómez, O.P., "The Meaning of Life, Health, Suffering and Death," in *The Journey Continues. Notes on Ethics and Bioethics* (Manila: University of Santo Tomas, 2009), 235-237.

of Vatican II, number 22 of GS we read: “It is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear” (GS 22, §1).

All are invited to follow Jesus: “All men are called to the union with Christ, who is the light of the world, from whom we go forth, through whom we live, and towards whom our whole life is directed” (LG 3). The Pastoral Constitution affirms: “Whoever follows Christ the perfect man becomes himself more a man” (GS 41, §1).

### THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

With the Pastoral Constitution, the conciliar fathers wish to contribute to “the establishment of a more human world for all” (GS 77, §1). It teaches that all men and women must work together towards making life “more humane” (GS 38, §2) and towards the establishment of a “universal brotherhood” (GS 38, §1), of a “true and full humanity” (GS 53, §1), “a world that is more human” (GS 57, §1).<sup>11</sup>

The human person is the main criterion of a humanist and theological ethics. He or she is “the centre and summit” to whom all things on earth ought to be ordained (GS 12, §1), including human activity (GS 35, §1). He or she is also “the source, the focus and the end of all economic and social life” (GS 63, §1). Indeed, the human person “is and ought to be the beginning, the subject and the object of every social organization” (GS 25, §1), and must be respected (GS 27, §1). The social order therefore is subordinated to man and not man to the social order: the social order and its development must “yield to the benefit of the human person” (GS 26, §3; cf. Mk 2:27).

The human person, created by God and redeemed by Christ (GS 29, §1), is the image of God (GS 12, §3; cf. CCC 1701-1709), an individual and a person. As an individual of the human species, he or she is body-soul (GS 14), intelligence and will, wisdom and love (GS 15), with a moral conscience that echoes the voice of God (GS 16). The human person is endowed with freedom (GS 17), a freedom that may be abused in sin and vice (cf. GS 13). The human being possesses intelligence to know, will to love and freedom to decide. The perfection of the human being is found in a wisdom that leads him “in the search and the love of what is true and good” (GS 15, §2; cf. CCC 1704). Vatican II writes: “Man is the only creature on earth that God has wanted for its own sake” (GS 24, §2).<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Equality is an essential quality of human nature, of every human being. But equality by itself cannot build a universal brotherhood: “A brotherhood, lacking a reference to a common Father as its ultimate foundation, cannot endure” (Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, 2013, 54). Cf. Josef Fuchs, S.J., “A Harmonization of the Conciliar Statements on Christian Moral Theology,” in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives*, Vol. 2, ed. René Latourelle, 485-489.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, 29, 3; Joseph Ma. Rovira Belloso, *Vaticano II: Un concilio para el tercer milenio* (Madrid: BAC, 2000), 43-59. Marciano Vidal says that the anthropology of GS is anthropology of integration, and writes: “A detail of integration is the synthesis between truth and wisdom, between intelligence and will (between dominicanism and franciscanism)” (“*Gaudium et spes y teologia moral*,” 117).



The human being is an individual being and a unique person, a rational person, is by nature a relational being open to God (GS 12-22), to others (GS 23-32), and to the world (GS 33-39). She or he is a social being by his innermost nature, and if he or she “does not enter into relations with others he can neither live nor develop his gifts” (GS 12, §4). Man’s vocation is love, which is the fullness of the law (GS 32, §3), a true love that is humble donation to others: man can only find himself “through a sincere gift of himself” (GS 24, §2; cf. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, FC, 1981, 11).

Moreover, the human person is a theological being. Created by God, he or she is capable of knowing and loving him (GS 12: CCC, 355-356), who is the Father of all, “Our Father,” and therefore, in every human being, the Christian sees God’s son or daughter (CCC 2212). His/her highest dignity is communion with God (GS 19, §1).

The human person is also an eschatological being. His hope is not mainly here now but here after. He or she is a pilgrim to the house of God the Father, to the Kingdom of Heaven. One’s life is a tension between this life and the life to come. One’s hope in God, however, does not diminish but empowers his true human hopes and urges him to work for the transformation of the world. Thus, “here on earth the Kingdom of God is mysteriously present; when the Lord comes it will enter into perfection” (GS 39, § 3; cf. GS 40, §2, and 43, §1; cf. Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, SS, 2007, 24-31).

From the late 1960s on, the description of human nature and of natural law is formulated by the concepts of human dignity and rights. The grounding of the human person in ethics, Christian ethics and social ethics is on his dignity and rights.

The *dignity* of the human being – a sublime dignity (GS 26, §2) – is equal in all persons (GS 29, §1 and 3; LG 9 and 32; John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, PT, 1963, 88). Man and woman, created by God, are equal (GS 12, § 4). This dignity comes from his nature, from his being, which is what counts most, and not his possessions (GS 35, § 1). A human dignity opened to God grounds freedom, equality and fraternity. Human dignity must be respected by cultures and social and economic life (cf. GS nos. 60 and 63).<sup>13</sup>

Human dignity is expressed in *human rights*, which are “universal and inviolable” (GS 26, §2; cf. GS 29, §2 and 41, §3; cf. John XXIII, *PT*, 273; CCC 2237), equal in all without any discrimination (GS 29, §2; *RH* 17). Human rights are necessarily related to corresponding *duties* (cf. GS 26, § 2): To one man’s right corresponds a duty in all other persons, namely “the duty of acknowledging and respecting the right in question” (*PT* 30 and 91). One of the great ironies of our times is the dissonant disharmony between rights and duties. Public authority’s commitment is to promote the rights and the common good of all citizens, to be defended and practiced “within the limits of the moral order” (GS 74, §3). The principle of the common good, a basic

---

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Vicente Botella Cubells, O.P., “La dignidad humana en el Vaticano II,” *Cultura Religiosa* 493 (Abril-Marzo 2012): 10-11; Jesús Espeja, *A los 50 años del Concilio*, 87; Pedro Trigo, “O caminho de humanização,” 109-207.

principle of social ethics, entails to “respect the rights and duties of the human person” (*DH* 6). All persons and believers in particular are asked by their own humanity and faith to respect the rights of all, primarily of “the most vulnerable” (*GS* 27, §1 and 2; cf. Mt 25:40). For the Christian, rights are also sacred, for they are inherent to every person, who is God’s creature.

It has been said that the teaching of Vatican II on human rights is deficient. Perhaps the conciliar fathers did not go deeper into it because John XXIII had published in 1963 the encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, which is devoted to human rights. Nevertheless, as some commentators underline, the basic teachings of Vatican II on human rights is also a point of departure for later teachings. The rights underlined by *GS* are, among others, *the right to life* at its beginning, the right to work (*GS* 67, §2), and the rights of workers to a just wage and to humane conditions of work (*GS* 71, §4).<sup>14</sup>

*Gaudium et Spes* – and Vatican II in general – has also been criticized by some authors and social activists for its weak teaching on the due *empowerment of women*. Still one may say that even on the question of women empowerment and rights, *GS* represents a step forward, and a point of departure. It has been said that *GS* is the first Church document that singles out women and underlines their equality in dignity (cf. *GS* 29 and 60). The Pastoral Constitution also acknowledges movements for women (*GS* 41 and 60) and their role as mothers and wives (*GS* 52 and 67). Many in the Church say – and the writer agrees – that the process towards a greater liberation of women is going on, but at a slow pace. It is interesting to note here that in his *Letter to Women* (1995), John Paul II says that the great process of women’s liberation is substantially a positive one, in spite of some mistakes done. This journey of liberation “must go on.”<sup>15</sup> Fifty years after the beginning of Vatican II, that journey must continue in the world and, of course, in the Church.

After answering the question on the dignity of the human person, we face the second question: What is the relevant teaching of *Gaudium et Spes* on some specific social values, namely justice, charity and peace, the poor and human life?

---

<sup>14</sup> Later doctrinal developments on human rights are found in *Justice in the World* (Synod of Bishops, 1971) and *The Church and Human rights* (Justice and Peace Commission, 1975). See International Theological Commission, *The Dignity and Rights of the Human Person*, 1985; Exiquio Martínez Fernández, “Los derechos humanos y la doctrina social de la Iglesia,” *Studium Legionense* 40 (1999): 147-182; Edouard Hamel, S.J., “The Foundations of Human Rights in Biblical Theology Following the Orientations of *Gaudium et Spes*,” in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives*, Vol. 2, ed. René Latourelle, 461. In the 60s, as Edouard Hamel explains well, the ‘in’ word was development, not human rights. In the 70s it begins to be different: human rights take centre stage politically, philosophically, theologically and even pastorally.

<sup>15</sup> John Paul II, *Letter to Women* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, June 29, 1995), no. 6; cf. Ivy A. Helman, *Women and the Vatican: An Exploration of Official Documents* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2012), 24-26. Helman studies well the issue of women in *GS* focusing on the numbers that mention women: 8, 9, 12, 27, 29, 52, 60 and 67.

## THE LONGING FOR JUSTICE, LOVE AND PEACE

In section two, we try to answer questions related to justice, charity and peace.

The mission of the Church in the world is to contribute with other peoples and social institutions to the building of a just, fraternal and peaceful society (cf. GS 72, §1). From a human and Christian perspective, the Church presents Christ as the model that inspires the social doctrine of the Church (cf. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, CA, 1991, 53). Jesus asks his disciples to seek the Kingdom of God by practicing the Beatitudes, including those who hunger and thirst for justice (Mt 5:6), and the peacemakers (Mt 5:9).

*Part II* of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* develops specific themes of social ethics: chapter one focuses on the ethics of marriage and the family; chapter two on cultural ethics, chapter three on ethics of the economy, chapter four on political ethics, and chapter five on international ethics and the ethics of peace.

Following Christian tradition, the social values pointed out by GS are freedom, truth, justice and love (GS 26, §3). The Church is committed to build with others the kingdom of justice and charity, and of truth and freedom (GS 76 §3, 5 and 6).<sup>16</sup>

## THE PATH OF JUSTICE AND CHARITY

In the Opening Prayer of Vatican II, Blessed John XXIII prayed: “As we gather in your name, may we temper justice with love so that all our decisions may be pleasing to you.”

The radical principle of social ethics and of the social doctrine of the Church in particular is the principle of respect for persons (cf. CCC 1929-1933), who are equal and therefore ought not be discriminated against by any reason – be it gender, race, colour, social condition, language or religion (GS 29, §2). This central principle is mediated by other ethical principles, in particular the principles of justice and love – of solidarity.

The Pastoral Constitution presents and updates the traditional teachings of the Church on justice and love, which are always together in the Old as well as in the New Testament. While the Old Testament uses more often the term justice, the New Testament, love or charity. In both, it is usually understood as justice/love. In Christian Tradition, justice is a paradigm of social ethics, and essentially important also in the other two paradigms, namely, the commandments and the Social Doctrine of the Church. From philosophical perspective, justice is understood as giving to others what belongs to them, that is, as underlined today, their dignity and rights. In Christian perspective, justice like any other virtue is vivified by love, which is the form of all virtues. Justice in Christian perspective is charitable or fraternal justice – a

---

<sup>16</sup> Cf. John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, PT; Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, PP 5, 48, 59; John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, SRS 38-40; Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, DCE 28-29; cf. CCC 2239.

justice that goes beyond pure justice. Charity is justice plus mercy (cf. Mt 20:1-16; Lk 15:11-32).

*Gaudium et Spes* underlines often the fundamental importance of *justice* and asks for justice and equity for all. There is a need of an authentic economic order in the world which shuns inequality and greed, and works for a holistic better life for all (GS 64), for a “better world in truth and justice” (GS 55), and for “a just world commerce” that is not at all a reality today (GS 85).

Classical theology underlines the thought that there cannot be full justice without charity or charity without justice. Certainly, justice is not sufficient by itself alone to attain even a just society. However, justice is absolutely necessary in working for a fraternal society.<sup>17</sup>

For the Christian in particular, the work for justice belongs to the essence of evangelization and preaching. The powerful social document *Justice in the World* puts it clearly: “Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel.”<sup>18</sup>

The social value and virtue of justice is always connected with *charity*. Guided by conscience (GS 76, §1), the Christians are asked to practice justice under the inspiration of charity (GS 72, §2). Charity is the most essential social value and virtue for Christians. Christ reveals God as love (1 Jn 4:8) and teaches that the basic law of human perfection and therefore of social transformation is his new commandment of love (GS 38, §1). *Gaudium et Spes* states: “Love of God and of one’s neighbour is the first and greatest commandment. Love of God cannot be separated from love of one’s neighbour. Any other commandment is summed up in this sentence, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself...’” (GS 24 §1).

Later, and in the context of terrorism, John Paul II speaks movingly of the relationship between *justice and forgiveness* (part of charity): both together exclude revenge and heal social relationships (John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace*, January 1, 1997). In 2005, Pope Benedict XVI points out the close relationship between *justice and love*. Justice, however, is not enough (cf. John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, 1980, 12). “Love – *caritas* – will always prove necessary, even in the most just society. ... This love (enkindled by the Spirit of Christ) does not

---

<sup>17</sup> In his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, DCE, 2005, Benedict XVI says that justice is principally the realm of the State. Here the Pope recalls the harsh words of St. Augustine: “A State which is not governed according to justice would be just a bunch of thieves” (DCE 28; St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, IV, 4: CCL 47, 102; cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, 21, 3 ad 2).

<sup>18</sup> Synod of Bishops 1971: *Justice in the World*, Introduction. With others, I believe that this prophetic document of the Synod of Bishops ought to be given more importance by the Social Doctrine of the Church. It is surprising that – to my knowledge – the excellent *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004) does not quote *Justice in the World*.

simply offer people material help, but refreshment and care for their souls, something which often is even more necessary than material support” (DCE 28; cf. Synod of Bishops 1971, *Justice in the World* 34).

Vatican II in general and GS in particular speak also of *solidarity* as the virtue which, for the Christian, encompasses justice and charity. It praises, among the positive values in our modern culture and life, “the sense of international solidarity” (GS 57, §5). The Post-Vatican II social teachings of the Church continue underlining the relevance of solidarity, in particular John Paul II in his encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (SRS 38-40).<sup>19</sup>

Christian faith nourished by love illumines our life and relationships and is also at the service of justice, law, peace, and the common good (cf. Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei* 51). For Christian social ethics, *the common good* is the object of justice and of charity as love of neighbour. All Christians, in particular the laity, ought to pay attention always to the common good in the light of the principles of the Church’s moral and social teaching” (Vatican II, AA 31, b). The common good is a central principle of human and Christian ethics. It is defined by GS as “the sum total of all those conditions of social life which enables individuals, families and organizations to achieve complete and efficacious fulfilment” (GS 74, §1). The common good refers not only to the common good of a community or a nation or a region, but of the whole world (GS 84, §1).

The Pastoral Constitution encourages all to contribute to the common good by respecting truth, practicing justice and charity in freedom (GS 26, §3). All citizens are asked by their humanity and Christians also by their faith to contribute to the common good by participating actively in social life (GS 31, §1-2). The political community exists and is justified by the common good (GS 74, §4; cf. CCC 1905-1909). The economic activities ought to be ordered to the common good (CV 36). Given the powerful and pervading influence of the mass media of communication, today of the digital world, it is necessary to underline the right of society and the individuals to a true and integral information grounded on justice and charity (Vatican II, *Inter Mirifica*, IM, 5, §2 and §3; CCC, 2494-2495).

## THE ROAD TO PEACE

The teachings on war and peace of *Gaudium et Spes* are influenced by John XXIII encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (1963), which appeared after the first session of the Vatican Council on April 15, 1963. *Gaudium et Spes* offers a wider and deeper opposition to war than in the documents of the preceding *magisterium*. Peace and war are taken up in the introduction of chapter five of the second part of the Pastoral

---

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Johannes Schasching, S.J., “From the Class War to the Culture of Solidarity,” in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives*, Vol. 3, ed. René Latourelle, 466-481; Marie Vianney Bilgrien, *Solidarity: A Principle, an Attitude, a Duty or the Virtue for an Interdependent World?* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999); Fausto Gómez, O.P., *Solidarity: The Heart of Christian Praxis*, 2nd ed. (Manila: University of Santo Tomas, 1985).

Constitution (GS nos. 77-82). The Council elucidates the meaning of true peace, defends and promotes peace, strongly condemns the savagery of war, and exhorts all Christians to cooperate, with Christ's help, with all peoples towards securing an authentic peace "based on justice and charity" (GS 77, §2).

*What is peace in GS?* Peace is "more than the absence of war." It is "the fruit of the right ordering of things with which the divine founder has invested human society and which must be actualized by man's thirsting after an ever more perfect reign of justice" (GS 78, §1). Peace is a dynamic concept and therefore "must be built continually." Working for peace requires absolutely respect for the dignity and rights of all other persons and peoples and the practice of fraternal love (GS 78, §1 and §2). Peace is the fruit of justice and love (GS 72, §1; 78, §1 and §2). Later teaching will spell out clearly that peace is the fruit of justice and solidarity: *Opus iustitiae pax, opus solidaritatis pax*" (cf. John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, 1980, 12). A common definition of justice today is: living together in justice and love.

*War* on the other hand is not a means to peace (cf. John Paul II, *PT* 127). It is wrong then to admit the classical saying "*Si vis pacem, para bellum*" (if you want peace, prepare for war). On the contrary, it is right to say "*Si vis pacem, para pacem*" (if you want peace, prepare for peace). Indeed, as Gandhi says: "There is no way to peace, peace is the way." There is, however, Vatican II teaches, a right of lawful self-defence" when "the protection of the rights of others and of the community" call for it (GS 78, §3), and "once all peace efforts have failed" (GS 79, §4). (A nagging question: *When may truly be said that all the peaceful means have been tried and failed? Why not try once more?*). There is no reason, however, "to impose domination on another nation" (GS 79, §4).

A fundamental path for fighting wars peacefully is by working in a committed manner to root out the causes of social divisions, "in the first place, injustice" (GS 83). The Pastoral Constitution denounces in particular some glaring injustices prevalent in our world. In a pluralistic society like ours, Christians are asked to fight "injustice and oppression, arbitrary domination and intolerance by individuals or political parties" (GS 75, §6). Christians with others must fight through means that are "worthy of human beings" (GS 81, §3), and in accordance with natural law and the law of the Gospel, and against the abuse of power by authority (GS 74, §4; cf. Pope Francis, *Lumen Fidei* 55).

*Gaudium et Spes* defends actions directed to avoid "the age-old slavery of war" (GS 81, § 3). Contrarily, GS is "against the crimes of war" (GS 79, §3), against "total war" (GS 80).<sup>20</sup> John Paul II had said in *Pacem in Terris* that in the context of the existing atomic power, "it is irrational to believe that war is still an apt means of vindicating violated rights" (*PT* 127). The Pastoral Constitution avers that facing the possibility of chemical warfare, "a completely fresh reappraisal of war" is needed (GS

---

<sup>20</sup> Being against the arms race, Vatican II is also against the atomic bomb, but this is not excluded explicitly (GS 82, §4). See Marciano Vidal, "*Gaudium et Spes* y teología moral," 135-137.



80, §2). In the context of nuclear and chemical weapons, it is almost impossible today to be in favour of the *Just War Theory*.<sup>21</sup>

War is not a path to peace. *Violence* in general is not a path to peace (GS 78, §4). Later magisterial texts went further: “Under the illusion of fighting evil, violence makes it worse” (John Paul II, CA 52, 25, 51, see also Paul VI, EN, 31). We all, therefore, “ought to work together without violence and without deceit to build up the world in a spirit of genuine peace” (GS 92, §5).

Vatican II is forcefully against the arms race, against *deterrence*: the accumulation of arms to deter adversaries from going to war does not diminish the possibility of war but aggravates it. Hence, “The arms race is one of the greatest curses on the human race” (GS 81, §3; cf. PP 53; CCC 2315); it is immoral (GS 81) and as such should be agreed upon by all concerned (GS 82, §1). The path to peace passes through disarmament. Peace and disarmament will be possible only if persons and peoples – nations – respect one another and cooperate together in building peace in the world.

Another important point to be added: the link between peace and *development*. Sociologically, we still speak of developed, developing and underdeveloped countries. Ethically, many among us question the dominant place of the economic aspect of development to the detriment of the political, ethical and spiritual dimensions of development. And some condemn justly the “super-development of rich nations that is made possible by the under-development of many other countries. Even in poor countries, there is a wasteful and consumerist development in the midst of “dehumanizing deprivation” (Benedict XVI, CV 22).

Authentic, wholesome development must be *integral development* as path of justice and love to peace. This development – personal and social – is peace. Paul VI says: “Development is the new name of peace” (PP nos. 87 and 76). Also when speaking of development, the Church underlines the centrality of the human person, who is “the principal agent of development” (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, RM, 1990, 58). Integral development includes necessarily ethical development – a development focused on the practice of the social values of freedom, truth, justice, love and peace (cf. PT 167; GS 78 and 73; John Paul II, RM 58). Human development is linked to salvation but not identified with it (EN 35). To work properly for human development and be able to make it part of the evangelizing mission of the Church, those involved must have “a firm grasp” of the social doctrine of the Church and its principles, criteria and directives (John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 1999, no. 32).

Underlining the inseparable link between social ethics and life ethics, Pope Benedict XVI writes: “The book of nature is one and indivisible; it takes in not only the environment but also life, sexuality, marriage, the family, social relations: in a

---

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Fausto B. Gómez, O.P., “The *Just War Theory*, a Path to Peace?,” *A Pilgrim’s Notes*, 97-122.

word, integral human development” (Benedict XVI, CV 51; cf. also, CV 48-50; CCC. 2415-2418).

In this context, there is a “very urgent need of re-education and a new orientation of public opinion” (GS 82, §3).<sup>22</sup> The essential teachings of Vatican II on peace and war have been developed dynamically by consequent social teachings, in particular the yearly messages of the Pope every January 1 on peace.<sup>23</sup>

The social teachings of the Church, including *Gaudium et Spes*, praise the non-violent path to fight injustice and violence: charity overcomes violence (GS 78, §4). It has been said that Vatican II is weak on its teachings on nonviolence as path of Christ. Still we have to say it is very innovative if compared with previous magisterial teachings on the matter. I remember what expert René Coste says on the matter: The official *magisterium* and theology have given more importance to the right of legitimate self- and collective-defence than to the commandment of Christian nonviolence.

Is *active nonviolence* today, fifty years after the beginning of Vatican II, the Christian path to peace? More and more Christians seem to believe so. The means to be used by Christians in fighting for justice and charity are the means of the Gospel; peaceful means (cf. Mt 5:1-48; GS 76, §5; DH 14, §4). Later social teaching will narrow down the exceptions for the use of violence in extreme violent situations. Nonviolent love means Christ’s unconditional meek and peaceful love (Mt 5:38-39, 43-44), “the power of love” (Martin Luther King, Jr.), “the power of truth” (Gandhi). Active resistance to evil is the proper Christian way, the way of the Sermon on the Mount. Only nonviolence will break the cycle of violence (structural, subversive, and repressive violence).<sup>24</sup>

Today we speak of global justice and solidarity and the universal longing for peace. In our world, we talk of justice and peace for all and of solidarity with all, above all, with the poor and marginalized in our world.

Let us now face the third question: Contemplating the inhuman and unjust reality of poverty in our world, what ought we to do?

---

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Joblin, S.J., “The Implications of the Teaching of *Gaudium et Spes* on Peace,” in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives*, Vol. 3, ed. René Latourelle, 482-495.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Message for the World Day of Peace, January 1, 2004; Id., CA, 18 and 23; Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace, January 1, 2013; cf. Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, no. 438.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation, Libertatis Conscientia*, 1986, no. 79; David Hollenbach S.J., “Commentary on *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World),” in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching*, ed. Kenneth R. Himes, O.F.M., 282-284; Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Love Your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism, and Just War Theory* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1994); Fausto Gómez, O.P., “Promoting Justice through Active Nonviolence,” *The Praxis of Justice and Solidarity*, 2nd ed. (Manila: University of Santo Tomas, 1988), 142-153.

## THE PRIORITY OF JUSTICE, CHARITY AND PEACE: THE POOR

The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, GS, begins with this meaningful and moving words: “The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well” (GS 1, §1).

Jesus Christ keeps telling his followers: “Blessed are the poor” (Lk 6:20), “Blessed are the poor in spirit” (Mt 5:3). With Jesus’s teaching in mind and the teachings of Christian Tradition, the conciliar fathers addressed forcefully the issue of poverty and the contribution the Church wishes to dynamically continue making to solve the scourge of poverty in our rich world.

In section three of our discussion, we shall deal first with the presence of the poor in *Gaudium et Spes* and second with the continuing struggle with the poor of the world.

## THE POOR IN GAUDIUM ET SPES

In a world with sufficient resources for all – like the one in the 1960s and onward – a great part of humanity is plagued by hunger, misery and illiteracy: “In no other age has mankind enjoyed such an abundance of wealth, resources and economic well-being; and yet a huge proportion of the people of the world is plagued by hunger and extreme need while countless numbers are totally illiterate” (GS 4, §4). The conquerable plague of forced poverty continues questioning us, the men and women of the twenty first century. Negative poverty keeps knocking loudly at the hearts and communities of Christians. After five decades, we can sadly say with John Paul II: “At the beginning of the Century the issue that challenges most our human and Christian consciences is the poverty of countless of millions of men and women” (John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace*, January 1, 2000, 14).

*What is causing this appalling poverty?* Partly, and substantially, the unjust distribution of the goods of the earth: “Great numbers of peoples are acutely conscious of being deprived of the world’s goods through injustice and unfair distribution and are vehemently demanding their share of them” (GS 9, §2). Excessive economic and social inequalities are “contrary to social justice, equity, the dignity of the human person and social and international peace” (GS 29, §3). On the positive side, and fortunately, the global struggle against poverty is producing factual and hopeful results.

Humane and reasonable economic growth may and often does reduce economic inequalities. At times, however, when economic growth is misguided by a kind of “economic mentality” aiming mainly at profit, it does not decrease but increase the existing inequalities. In some places, GS tells us, economic progress “even leads to a decline in the position of the underprivileged and contempt for the poor” (GS 63, §3). The huge gap between the few rich and the many poor is a great scandal – yesterday and today. *Gaudium et Spes* thunders: “In the midst of huge numbers

deprived of the absolute necessities of life there are some who live in riches and squander their wealth; and this happens in less developed areas as well” (GS 63, §3).

Another clear cause of poverty and misery in our world is the *arms race*, “one of the greatest curses of the human race,” an “intolerable scandal.” The Pastoral Constitution asserts: “As long as extravagant sums of money are poured into the development of new weapons, it is impossible to devote adequate aid in tackling the misery which prevails at the present day in the world” (GS 81, §2 and 3; cf. PP 53).

In the midst of terrible poverty in our world, Vatican II recaptures the main ethical principle to be carried out by all, that is, the principle of the *universal destination of the goods of the earth*: God created the world for all and therefore all have a right to a share in the goods of the earth. This essential principle of social ethics and of the Social Doctrine of the Church is deeply connected with the principles of justice and solidarity, the principle of the common good, and, in a very concrete way, with the principle of the preferential option or love for the poor, which is much underlined after Vatican II: The Christian has to love all, and principally, preferentially – like God, like Jesus – the poor and downtrodden.

As in other social teachings, here the Pastoral Constitution is also radically innovative by re-affirming faithfully and creatively the corresponding teachings of the Sacred Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church and great theologians, in particular St. Thomas Aquinas. In one of the most quoted texts of Vatican II we read:

God destined the earth and all it contains for all men and all peoples so that all created things would be shared fairly by all mankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity.... In his use of things man should regard the external goods he legitimately owns not merely as exclusive to himself but common to others also, in the sense that they can benefit others as well as himself. Therefore every man has the right to possess a sufficient amount of the earth’s goods for himself and his family (GS 69, §1; cf. also, *ibid.* footnote 10).

This significant number – ever relevant – also says that all must help the persons in need, the poor, “not merely out of their superfluous goods” (GS 69, §1; cf. GS 88, §2). In this context, and as pointed out briefly by Vatican II Pastoral Constitution (GS 69), *private property* is needed by all; however, all private property has in itself a social dimension as continually affirmed and re-affirmed by the Social Doctrine of the Church (cf. GS 71; cf. PP 23; SRS 42; LE 14). All Christians are asked by Jesus to be poor in spirit (cf. GS 72), that is, detached from possessions, living simply and in solidarity with the poor. Christians are not called to a miserable life but to a simple life style: “Following Jesus in his poverty they (the lay faithful) are neither depressed by the lack of temporal goods nor inflated by their abundance” (Vatican II, AA, 4). The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* summarizes the teaching of

Vatican II later developed by the encyclicals following GS: “The right to private property is subordinated to the principle of the universal destination of goods.”<sup>25</sup>

*Gaudium et Spes* reminds us that the Church does not care about external power, but about “the effective living of faith and love” (GS 42, §3). The Church’s mission in the world is a mission of service and mercy: She is obliged “to initiate action for the benefit of all men, especially of those in need, like works of mercy and similar undertakings” (GS 42, §2). Considering that the ignorant are also poor in a real way, the Church must contribute to their liberation from “the curse of ignorance” (GS 60, §1) and thus preparing them too for participation in social and cultural life, taking into account women, who “ought to be permitted to play their part fully according to their own particular nature” (GS 60, §3).

As means to a useful social action, GS proposes broadly well-organized and useful associations (GS 88, §3). In his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (2005), Benedict XVI develops well the Church’s organizations for charitable work. (Parenthetically: Presently, and throughout the world, *Caritas* represents the best face of the Church, of the Christian: a compassionate face.)

*What is the follower of Christ asked to do in a continuing situation of poverty?* True faith is witnessed in justice and love “especially towards those in need” (GS 21, §5). Hence the followers of Christ ought to be not like the rich man of the Gospel who disregarded the poor Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31; cf. GS 27, §1), but like the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37). The Christian ought to make himself or herself a neighbour of every human being and help especially the needy, who can be an abandoned elderly, a foreign worker, a refugee, or a starving human being. These are some of the faces of the poor and needy that represents Jesus Christ yesterday in 1965 and today in 2012. The Council fathers recall Jesus’ saying: “As long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it for me” (Mt 25:40; GS 27, §1 and §2).<sup>26</sup>

## THE STRUGGLE WITH THE POOR CONTINUES

The ethical principle of the universal destination of the goods of the earth is mediated by principles of justice, love and by the common good. These ethical

---

<sup>25</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 2004, no. 28; cf. John Paul II, *CA*, chap. 4; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, 66, 2. For a theological development of the revolutionary teaching of St. Thomas on the matter, you may see Fausto Gómez, O.P., “Relevance of St. Thomas Aquinas on Justice Today,” *The Journey Continues*, 141-170.

<sup>26</sup> The Word of God grounds the social teachings of the Church. *Gaudium et Spes* in particular appeals to the Sacred Scriptures more forcefully and frequently than the previous *Magisterium* to argue from faith the teachings on justice and love, and on the option for the poor (cf. Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, DV 10; *DH* 14). See Romanus Cessario, O.P., “Scripture as the Soul of Moral Theology: Reflections on Vatican II and Resourcement,” *The Thomist* 76, no. 2 (April 2012): 165-188; Fausto Gómez, O.P., “Biblical Teachings on Justice,” in *The Journey Continues*, 105-140.

principles constitute the solid foundation of the *preferential love or option for the poor* (GS 69, § 1; cf. John Paul II, *Centessimus Annus*, CA chap. 4).

Fifty years after Vatican II, the so-called preferential option or love for the poor or more simply the option for the poor, is still a pending subject. Certainly, much has been done in the last fifty years, but the journey to a greater justice and equality in solidarity and to a deeper and wider witnessing of the universal destination of the goods of the earth continues. Christians with all men and women of good will must continue travelling the still less travelled road, the road of the poor.

Hopefully, the Church will be known more and more as what it claims to be: the Church of the poor, a poor Church for the poor people – as Pope Francis is repeating to us with simple and humble gestures, a simple life style, and clear words.<sup>27</sup>

Pope John XXIII said one month before the opening of the Second Vatican Council: “The Church is and wants to be the Church of all, particularly the Church of the poor.” Pope Paul VI, the Pope of the last three sessions of the Council (1963-1965) said in Medellin, Colombia, before his memorable address to inaugurate the remarkable assembly of the Latin American Bishops (CELAM) in August 1968: The poor are the Sacrament of Christ; we venerate Christ in the poor. He expounded these pace-setting ideas in his powerful encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (PP 32; cf. LG 8).<sup>28</sup>

At times and particularly by some rich and pious Christians too, the poor are considered as the ones mainly responsible for their poverty and misery, and therefore, are seen as the problem. John Paul II says: The poor should be seen “not as a problem, but as a people who can become the principal builders of a new and more human future for everyone.”<sup>29</sup> Like all other human beings, the poor have the equal right to seat at the table of the common banquet” (SRS 33; PP 47)

It is a fact that generally the teaching of the Church has given more importance to fight heresies than to struggle with the poor, that is, to orthodoxy than to orthopraxis. In and from Vatican II, and fortunately, orthopraxis is being given more importance. Perhaps the best text I know on the matter is one of Pope John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2001). It reminds us that the Parable

---

<sup>27</sup> Pope Francis tells us that he chose the name Francis for two main reasons: Francis of Assisi was poor and a peaceful person. He has repeated a few times since his inauguration of the Petrine Ministry that he would love to have “a poor Church for the poor.” At the inaugurating Mass as Bishop of Rome on March 19, 2013, Pope Francis says: The Pope “must open his arms to protect all of God’s people and embrace with tender affection the whole of humanity, especially the poorest, the weakest, the least important, those whom Matthew lists in the final judgment on love: the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and those in prison” (Pope Francis, *Homily at Inauguration of Petrine Ministry Mass*, Vatican City, March 19, 2013, <https://zenit.org/articles/pope-francis-homily-at-inauguration-of-petrine-ministry-mass/>).

<sup>28</sup> Paul VI as quoted by Kurt Appel and Sebastian Pittl, “Vaticano II - La Chiesa e i poveri: ritorno alle origini,” *Il Regno*, no. 2 (January 15, 2013): 49.

<sup>29</sup> John Paul II, Message for the World day of Peace: January 1, 2000, no. 14; cf. Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, no. 449).



of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:35-37) is not a simple invitation to practice the works of charity, "it is a page of Christology that sheds a ray of light on the ministry of Christ. By these words no less than by the orthodoxy of her doctrine, the Church measures her fidelity as the Bride of Christ" (NMI 49).

In the midst of a world of plenty, but with millions of poor children, women and men, the Lord continues asking his followers today: "*What are you doing for the poor around you? I am hungry in the hungry, I am thirsty in the thirsty, I am sick in the sick...*" "*What you do to my poor brothers and sisters, you do it to me*" (Cf. Mt 25: 31-46; SRS 13).

The option for the poor focuses not only on the materially poor but also the sick, the weak and the defenceless in our world, including the born and unborn children, the young, and the old people whose life is mercilessly terminated – at times even legally.

Number four of our paper will face the question: What does today's reading of *Gaudium et Spes* teach us on the defence and promotion of human life?

#### DEFENSE AND PROMOTION OF HUMAN LIFE

In part four of our essay, we try to answer the fourth question of our reflection.

Vatican II was celebrated in the decade of the sixties and therefore it reflects the social and cultural situation of this decade. At that time, there was no especial focus on human rights, on environmental issues and on the beginning and the end of life. In that context, the Social Doctrine of the Church underlined – as we said earlier – four social values, namely, truth, freedom, justice and love (cf. John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 36; GS 26). At that time, life was not considered mainly a social but a personal and family issue. Human life was not explicitly considered the fifth essential social value, as it is so now, particularly from John Paul II pace-setting encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (1995),<sup>30</sup> which opened "a new era of magisterial teaching" (CV 15).

Truly, human life is also a social issue. As human life is also a social issue so is peace a personal issue too. "Nor can there be true peace unless life is defended and promoted" (EV 101). Benedict XVI explains: "Only if human life from conception until death is respected is the ethic of peace possible and credible; only then may nonviolence be expressed in every direction, only then can we truly accept creation and only then can we achieve true justice."<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Cf. "Vatican II Continued Half a Century Later," *Commonweal*: 10/01/2012, accessed October 4, 2012, <http://commonwealmagazine.org/Vatican-ii-continued>.

<sup>31</sup> Benedict XVI, "Conclusion of the Meeting of the Holy Father with the Bishops of Switzerland," November 9, 2006; quoted by Marvin L. Krier Mich, *The Challenge and Spirituality of Catholic Social*

Moreover, the common good – the object of justice and solidarity – is not possible without the respect for human dignity and rights, beginning with the right to life. Writes Pope John Paul II: “It is impossible to further the common good without acknowledging and defending the right to life, upon which all the other inalienable rights of individuals are founded and from which they develop” (EV 101).

A Christian’s duty is to proclaim, celebrate and serve life (EV 92) always, including at its beginning and its end.

### **HUMAN LIFE AT ITS BEGINNING: MARRIAGE, LOVE AND LIFE**

Following the traditional teaching of the Church, *Gaudium et Spes* presents the basic principles regarding the defence and promotion of human life. This life must be protected from its beginning: “Life must be protected with the utmost care from the moment of conception” (GS 51, §3), that is, “from the time of its very beginning” (Synod of Bishops 1985; EV 21, 28, 29, etc.)

From 1962 onward, *abortion* (termination of pregnancy when not yet viable) progressively became legally acceptable in many countries of the world, and also biomedical research on human embryos (embryonic stem-cell research implies the death of the respective embryos). In 1965, Vatican II proclaims: “Abortion and infanticide are abominable crimes” (GS 51, §3). Later on, in 1995, John Paul II teaches, after recommending the need of principled research on human embryos: “The use of human embryos or fetuses as an object of experimentation constitutes a crime against their dignity as human beings who have a right to the same respect owed to a child once born, just as to every person” (EV 63).<sup>32</sup>

The beginning of a new human life is closely linked to the nature of the human person, the meaning of sex, marriage and the family. Concerning marriage and the

---

*Teaching* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 73. Benedict XVI writes in *Caritas in Veritate* (no. 15): “The Church forcefully maintains this link between life ethics and social ethics.” See Gerald O’ Collins, S.J., *Living Vatican II: The 21<sup>st</sup> Council for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2006), 92-99.

<sup>32</sup> Two important documents of the Church address fully the grave issues connected with life at its beginning and embryonic stem-cell research: the Instructions from the Vatican Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith *Donum Vitae* (*On Respect for Human Life at its Origins and for the Dignity of Procreation*, 1987), and *Dignitas Personae* (*On Certain Bioethical Questions*, 2008). Earlier, in 1974, the same Vatican Congregation issued the *Declaration on Procured Abortion*. In his encyclical on the Gospel of Life John Paul II formulated the clear stand of the Church. The focus in the 60s and 70s was more on human life in-between, that is, after birth and before its end. The emphasis was – at least theoretically - more on a dignified life for all born human beings. This explains, for instance, that in its “commitment and service,” FABC did not speak much then explicitly of the beginning of life and its defence. (Many local Churches did stand publicly and explicitly against the culture of death and for a culture of life, e. gr., the Philippine Church. This is another reason, perhaps, why FABC did not wish to duplicate the contextualized teachings of the local Churches of Asia). For a theologian-pastoral approach to the outstanding teachings of the Federation of the Asian Bishops’ Conferences, see Jonathan Yun-Katan, “Theologizing at the Service of Life,” *Gregorianum* 81/3 (2000): 541-575; also *FABC Papers*, no. 108, 1-36.

family, the Pastoral Constitution touched – on chapter one of part two – upon “certain important features” of the Church’s traditional doctrine (GS 47, §3; cf. GS 47-52), among others: conjugal love, procreation and the education of children, formation of conscience, responsible parenthood, and the spirituality of conjugal and family life. *Marriage* is innovatively described not mainly as a contract but as a covenant, as “an intimate union,” “a covenant of life and love,” an image of “the covenant between Christ and the Church,” the sacrament of Christian marriage (GS 48, §1). Marriage and conjugal love are directed by themselves to “the procreation and education of children”; this education includes in particular religious education (GS 48, §1 and 50, §1; RH 4). The council is the first document of the magisterium to abandon the hierarchy of the ends of marriage: no more primary and secondary ends of marriage. Moreover, Vatican II presents, in contrast with previous magisterial texts, a very positive vision of marriage and of the marital sexual actuation: “The acts proper to marriage by which the intimate and chaste union of the spouses takes place are noble and honourable” (GS, 49, §2; cf. Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, HV 11).

The Pastoral Constitution points out certain “deformations” of marriage and conjugal love, such as, adultery, polygamy, divorce and the so-called free love and same-sex unions (cf. CCC 1605). Conjugal love is also profaned by “selfishness, hedonism and the unlawful contraceptive practices” (GS, 47, §2, and 49, §2).

*Gaudium et Spes* admits that “there are also the serious and alarming problems arising in many parts of the world as a result of population increases” (GS 47, §2). The Pastoral Constitution points out, too, that our world is giving more attention to “the forecasting and control of its own population growth” than to other issues related to justice and poverty (GS 5, §2).<sup>33</sup>

The issue of *birth control* although discussed by the Council fathers was almost set aside in the promulgated text of the Pastoral Constitution. Upon the petition of Pope Paul VI, the question on population control as well as on the methods of contraception was deferred. The Council “has no intentions of proposing concrete solutions at this moment” (GS 51, §3n14). *Gaudium et Spes* does give the traditional

<sup>33</sup> If population growth is to be slowed down in certain countries – and the Church sees this possibility (cf. SRS 25, FC 31; CCC 2372) –, it ought to be done through methods that are according to the moral order, to natural law (GS 87, § 3; EV 91); cf. also John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, FC, 1981, 30, 31, 34, and SRS 25; CCC 2372). As I re-read *Gaudium et Spes* fifty years after Vatican II, in particular number 5, titles of books and articles in the 1980s and 1990s come to my mind, such as “The Population Bomb,” or “The Population Bomb: Apocalypse Now?” Those prophesies of doom have not materialized. In fact, demographers tell us, the world is entering into a steady population decline; in the Western world, the problem is already the dwindling numbers of children to worrying levels. For a theological approach to marriage and family according to the Pastoral Constitution GS, see Marcelino Zalba, S.J., “Dignidad del matrimonio y de la familia,” in *Comentarios a la Constitución Gaudium et Spes sobre la Iglesia en el mundo actual*, ed. Cardenal Ángel Herrera Oria (Madrid: BAC, 1968), 405-443; Leonhard M. Weber, “Excursus on *Humanae Vitae*,” in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Vol. V: *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York/London: Herder and Herder/Burns & Oates, 1969), 397-402; Marciano Vidal, “*Gaudium et spes* y teología moral,” 146-149).

teaching on the matter: “Acts proper to married life are to be ordered according to authentic human dignity” (GS 51, §3); methods of contraception that are not approved by divine law as interpreted by the Church are forbidden (*Ibid.*); the Church respects the dignity of conscience (GS 16 and 76, §1) and the legal protection of “conscientious objectors who refuse to carry arms,” and implicitly of those who oppose abortion and euthanasia (GS 79, §3; CCC 2311). This teaching became explicit later on, in particular in *Evangelium Vitae* (EV 73-74; DH 3, §2).

Pope Paul VI came out with an encyclical on the matter: *Humanae Vitae* in 1968. The central point of *HV* is this: “Each and every marital act must remain in itself ordered to the transmission of life” (*HV* 11; cf. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, FC, 29). Moreover, there is an inseparable link between union and procreation in the marital act, which is at the same time unitive and procreative. With abortion, *HV* condemns as immoral, direct sterilization, acts that prevent procreation before, during and after the marital act (cf. CCC 2376-2377).<sup>34</sup>

The Pastoral Constitution appears rather innovative on the question of *responsible parenthood*. It teaches that the married couples are the ones to decide on the matters directly related to marriage and family and particularly on the number of children they will have. Both shall decide together (GS 50, §2), for both have the same human dignity (GS 49, §2). Their decision must be rationally responsible and made before God, according to a conscience adjusted to God’s law and the teaching of the Church (GS 50, §2). Therefore, the number of children a couple may have depends not on public authority but on the parents themselves who are asked to be responsible (GS 87, §3; *Ibid.* 50, §2; cf. Paul VI, *HV* 10; John Paul II, FC 6 and 31).

*Gaudium et Spes* speaks of the profound changes that are taking place in our world, as a result of the developments of science and technology. The Church teaches, guarding against scientism or the absoluteness of science, that “science without conscience can lead to man’s ruin.”<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Benedict XVI, clearly opposed to the use of massive use of condoms as a means of birth control, in 2010 opened the door to the use of the condom, as a lesser evil. Writer Peter Seewald asked Pope Benedict XVI in 2010 on the use of condoms. Benedict XVI answered: “There may be a basis in the case of some individuals, as perhaps when a male prostitute uses a condom, where this can be a first step in the direction of a moralization, a first assumption of responsibility, on the way towards recovering an awareness that not everything is allowed and that one cannot do whatever one wants. But it is not really the way to deal with the evil of HIV infection. That can really lie only in a humanization of sexuality.” The Pope added: “She (the Church) of course does not regard it (the use of condoms) as a real or moral solution, but, in this or that case, there can be nonetheless, in the intention of reducing the risk of infection, a first step in a movement toward a different way, a more human way, of living sexuality” (*Light of the World, The Pope, the Church, and the Signs of the Times* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010], chap. 11, 117-119; cf. Fausto B. Gómez, OP., “HIV/AIDS in Ethical Perspective,” *A Pilgrim’s Notes*, 319n2).

<sup>35</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dignitas Personae*, 2008, no. 2: True science cannot be opposed to faith or vice versa. Science, however, must respect its ethical dimension and its limitations.

## HUMAN LIFE AT ITS END

Fifty years after the beginning of Vatican II, human life is often not respected today: the practice of legal euthanasia is growing, suicides seem to be increasing and homicides continue to make it often to the front pages of the dailies. It is more respected, fortunately, regarding capital punishment: the death penalty has been abolished in many countries and its application is also rare in some other countries. Still it is the highest punishment in many other countries of the world.

Following the earlier traditional teaching, the Pastoral Constitution calls for respect for human life and speaks about crimes against life: “All offenses against life itself, such as murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia and wilful suicide... are criminal, poison civilization, debase the perpetrators and are contrary to the honour due to the Creator (GS 27, §3; Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, RN, 1891, 62).

The Pastoral Constitution speaks against *suicide* as one of the acts against human life (cf. CCC 2280). It is also against *euthanasia* (direct intentional killing), but nothing else is said about it.<sup>36</sup>

Capital punishment is growingly considered in contemporary society as a crime against the inalienable right to life of every individual. In the Church more and more Christian communities label it as another expression of the culture of death, although still a seemingly good number of Christians consider it lawful in some extreme criminal cases. Reading *Gaudium et Spes* fifty years after the beginning of the Second Vatican Council, I feel obliged to say a little more on capital punishment.

How does the Church see *death penalty* from Vatican II to today? The death penalty is not mentioned in any Vatican II document. In the 1960s, the Church was silent. Pope Pius XII was the last Pope to speak explicitly in favour of the death penalty. The official silence of Vatican II – a significant silence – was continued by John XXIII and Paul VI. In the last half of the twentieth century, fortunately, many ethicists and theologians were speaking for the abolition of the death penalty, and the movement for the abolition of the death penalty is generally and steadily growing.

---

Without conscience, science and technology may become idolatry (cf. AA 7, §3). After all, “redemption comes not from science but from love” (Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, 26). Cf. Manuel Cuyás, S.J., “Biomedical Progress and its Demands on Moral Theology,” in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives*, Vol. 3, ed. René Latourelle, 496-527; Fausto B. Gómez, O. P., “Vatican Instruction on *Dignitas Personae*,” *The Journey Continues*, 275-285.

<sup>36</sup> Later on, in 1980, the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith issued the *Declaration on Euthanasia*. Cf. EV 65. Euthanasia is called “mercy killing,” but killing a human being is truly merciless. Writes John Paul II: “True compassion leads to sharing another’s pain: it does not kill the person whose sufferings we cannot bear” (EV 66). Today moralists and bioethicists speak also of *dysthanasia* or the undue prolongation of life when treatment is too burdensome or useless and extraordinary or disproportionate, and therefore not obligatory (cf. CCC 2278) and *orthothanasia* or correct dying, that is allowing to die when the time comes neither earlier (euthanasia) nor later (dysthanasia). Beneficial, ordinary, proportionate treatment is to be given always, for it is part of our obligation to care for our body and health – for our life (cf. Fausto B. Gómez, O.P., “Killing and Allowing to Die: What Is the Difference?” *A Pilgrim’s Notes*, 263-279).

Capital punishment is a crime against the right to life and – for most believers – it is also against the sacredness of life, which belongs to God, the Lord of life and death. It is, moreover, against love of neighbour.

There was some hesitation on the death penalty in the first edition of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992). There was a diminishing hesitation in John Paul II's *EV* (no. 56) and in the final edition of *CCC* (1997, no. 2267, §3). John Paul writes in *Evangelium Vitae*: "Human life must be defended from the moment of conception to natural death" (*EV* 21, 28, 29, etc.), but still the door to the capital punishment was not totally closed: The offender may be executed in cases of absolute necessity, "which are very rare if not practically non-existent" (*EV* 56, §2; *CCC* 2267, §3).

By 1999, John Paul II defended clearly a consistent-life-ethic, that is, an ethics that respects life at its beginning and natural end, an ethics that is, therefore, not only against abortion and euthanasia and suicide and homicide, but also against the death penalty. By then, John Paul II was absolutely against capital punishment as was clearly shown in his homily in St. Louis, Missouri on November 7, 1999.<sup>37</sup>

*How may a believer in Jesus proclaim the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7) and be in favour of the death penalty?* "Love your enemies," "pray for those who persecute you," forgive always, heal the wounded on the road...! Christ gave second and third ...chances to all sinners.

The defence and promotion of human life in a consistent manner include the beginning of life (against abortion), its end (against homicide, suicide, offensive war and the death penalty), and in-between its beginning and end (against poverty, injustice, violence, human trafficking, and the exploitation of the environment). It also connects necessarily with the respect of all life and the caring and stewardship for the environment.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> John Paul II was the first Pope to speak openly – during the last fifteen years of his Pontificate and in a progressive rhythm - against the death penalty which is described in his famous St. Louis Homily as "cruel and unnecessary." In this homily, the Polish Pope proclaims: "The new evangelization calls for followers of Christ who are unconditionally pro-life: who will proclaim, celebrate and serve the Gospel of life in every situation." Benedict XVI has repeated that life must be defended up to "natural death." In *Caritas in Veritate*, he writes: "If there is lack of respect for the right to life and to a natural death..., the conscience of society ends up losing the concept of human ecology and, along with it, that of environmental ecology" (VC 51). Cf. John Paul II, *Homily*, Trans World Dome at St. Louis, Missouri, January 27, 1999. For a summary of the pro- and con- arguments in favour and against capital punishment, see Fausto B. Gómez, O.P., "Abolition of the Death Penalty: A Christian Perspective," *A Pilgrim's Notes*, 280-306.

<sup>38</sup> I wish to add an important note that I am not able to develop here, on respect for all life and the environment. Respect for God's creatures includes also respect for non-rational beings, for plants and for the whole creation. The respect for the integrity of creation is part of God's seventh commandment (cf. *CCC* 2415-2418). The Pastoral Constitution does not give, in particular, sufficient importance and relevance to the ecological issues and the *environment*. Issues and concerns over the environment have developed immensely through these fifty years since Vatican II. Today, the protection of the



Respect for life, human ecology, the broken harmony within and without the human person demand change – and God’s help. In this final section of our long journey we face the fifth question: *What does Gaudium et Spes teach us today on the need of change and prayer to be able to transform the world?*

#### **RECIPE FOR CHANGE: CONVERSION, WITNESSING AND PRAYER**

In the final part of our paper, we shall focus on conversion, witnessing, and prayer for social action.

The Church has – and admits – its own limitations and failures (GS 43, §3-4). Moreover, Vatican II affirms in *Gaudium et Spes* that the divorce between the faith many profess and its practice in daily life is one of the gravest errors of our time (cf. GS 43, §1; cf. also GS 43, §6; LG 10 and 12; DV 2; AA 6; AG 11, 21 and 36).

Vatican II speaks of the form of the world “distorted by sin” (GS 39, §1), and of the “deplorable state of humanity” (GS 79, §2) due to sin that corrupts and divides and makes man’s life as “struggle, and a dramatic one, between good and evil, between light and darkness” (GS 13, §2). The human person possesses unique dignity that is to be recognized, esteemed and revered. However, he or she is a divided being, a weak person, a vulnerable creature – a sinner. His human dignity is negatively affected by sin (GS 13). His conscience, a sign of his unique dignity, can also be vitiated by habitual sin, by vices which darken the light of conscience to see good and avoid evil (cf. GS 16). Sin and sins also influence wrongly his personal and social life, his vision, attitudes and values (cf. GS 82, §2 and 3; AA 7, §5). The Pastoral Constitution states that the disturbances in the social order are mainly caused by pride, envy, hatred, distrust and animosity (cf. GS 25, §3 and 83).

To be builders of a just and fraternal world, we human persons need to be just and compassionate. To be able to liberate society from corruption, violence and injustice, we need to be individually liberated, at least substantially or humbly on the way to “liberation from sin and the Evil One,” that is the most radical liberation (EN 9). The Church, all her members – bishops and priests, religious men and women, the lay persons – are asked to examine their conscience and their style of life (cf. John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, 1961, 161 and 168; Paul VI, *PP* 49 and 53 and *Octogesima Adveniens*, OA, 1971, 48; *Justice in the World* 48).

---

environment, of creation is part of a consistent life-ethic. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* is the first encyclical to face ecological issues (see SRS 29 and 34). The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) issued – to my knowledge – the first pastoral letter on the environment of an episcopal conference, with *What Is happening to Our Beautiful Land?* (Manila: CBCP, 1988). We read in the encyclical *Lumen Fidei* (no. 55): “Faith ... enables us to respect nature all the more, and to discern in it a grammar written by the hand of God and a dwelling place entrusted to our protection and care.”

## CONTINUING CONVERSION

The human person, the believer therefore needs conversion, integral conversion, that is, personal and social conversion: conversion to God, to others and to creation. Personal conversion, however, “is needed first” (OA 48; cf. Mt 4:17), that is, a change of mind and heart, “a new heart” (GS 82, §3), God’s grace to be able to repent and be reconciled (cf. AG 8, §2).

In his Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, Benedict XVI underlines the need of conversion: “The Year of Faith is a summons to an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord, the one Saviour of the world’ (no. 6; cf. also no. 5). As many have stressed, without internal transformation and conversion Vatican II is nothing. This is also true when applied to evangelization - and to the new evangelization: “The new evangelization is centred on conversion to truth and love of Christ and, consequently, the spiritual and moral rebirth of individuals and societies” (Benedict XVI, *Message for the World Day of Peace*, January 1, 2013).

There were two currents in Vatican II and these continued through the fifty years up to today. This is part of the plurality of opinions and approaches. What is important is that we all need – the liberal majority and the conservative minority in Vatican II, and perhaps now the other way around – to be humble and accept diversity in the Church, criticize less, dialogue more and do more as service to the world, to all, to the poor. The Church respects diversity of opinions (cf. GS 62), and so must we! It is so easy to appear “wiser and holier” than the other side! There is a real need of conversion of the progressive as well as of the conservative sides in the Church. We all agree on this: God’s presence in the world is shown primarily by “the brotherly love of the faithful who, being all of one mind and spirit work together for the faith of the Gospel and present themselves as a sign of unity” (GS 21, §5).

I wish to underline a point mentioned by some commentators: There is a secularization of intra-ecclesial moral reflection which diminishes “inexorably” the moral contribution of the Church to the world.<sup>39</sup> Reading the *Lineamenta* of the 2012 Synod of Bishops, I came across an interesting quote from Benedict XVI that states: “In the decades after Vatican II, some have interpreted the Council’s opening to the world not as a new missionary ardor of the Heart of Jesus, but as a step towards a secularization that possesses values of great Christian density such as equality, freedom and solidarity, and made themselves available to certain concessions and discover avenues of collaboration. Without noticing, it resulted in the fall to the self-secularization of many Christian communities...” As a consequence, many were disillusioned. “What our contemporaries want to see in us is what they do not see in other parts: The joy and hope that sprout from the reality of being with the Risen Lord.”<sup>40</sup> It appears to some – or many – of us that in public discussions we Christians

---

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Manuel Sánchez Tapia, “El concilio Vaticano II. A los 50 años de su inauguración,” *La Ciudad de Dios* CCXXX, no. 1 (Enero-Abril 2012): 361-387, esp. 370-371.

<sup>40</sup> Benedict XVI, Speech to the Brazilian Bishops in their Visit ‘ad limina apostolorum’, Vatican City, September 7, 2009; quoted in Synod of Bishops XIII Ordinary General Assembly, *Lineamenta: The New Evangelization for the Transmission of Christian Faith*, no. 19 (Madrid: BAC-documentos, 2011), 85n76.

are at times leaving our faith at home, or appear as afraid of showing orally and/or explicitly our faith in God and in Jesus Christ. Of course, we always try to show *veritas in caritate*, or *caritas in veritate*.

### WITNESSING: FIRST AUTHENTIC WORD

In our mass-media dominated world, there is an obvious inflation of words. We all, perhaps, have to speak less and do more! We Christians – the so-called liberals and conservatives – need more emphasis on orthopraxis than in orthodoxy. The world will not change through words but through practice: Jesus saved us not through words but by suffering and dying on the Cross for humanity.

We Christians in particular ought to denounce less, announce more, and, above all, renounce sin and witness what we preach and ask others to do (cf. Paul VI, *EN*, 41; John Paul II, *RM* 42, and *Ecclesia in Asia* 42; Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis* 85). I have to add: we do not forget that the Christian attitude is, as *GS* reminds us, a kind and compassionate attitude towards all, including evildoers (cf. *GS* 28).

Many writers and speakers feel that with the inauguration of a new Pope, Pope Francis (March 2013), a new springtime for the Church is dawning, a sort of “Vatican moment,” and a new rebirth of the spirit of *aggiornamento* or updating of the Second Vatican Council.<sup>41</sup> Some others caution, however, that the huge wave of admiration for the new Pope ought to be completed by the corresponding imitation of the Pope’s – and many others’ – simple lifestyle, dedication to justice, peace and the integrity of creation, and real compassion for the excluded and forgotten of our world. The bridge from admiration to imitation (ultimately for us the imitation of Christ, to whom all saints point) is called change, *metanoia*, conversion of heart and mind. Only integral conversion can make a U-turn from selfishness to love of neighbour, from individualism to solidarity, from violence to nonviolence, from mere justice to forgiving and fraternal justice.

Christians must bear witness to Christ, that is, must show “the face of Christ to the world” (cf. *LG* 7). What matters for Christians is recognizing Christ “in the persons of all men and love them with an effective love, in word and in deed, thus bearing witness to the truth” (*GS* 93, §1).

The Gospel must be proclaimed above all by witnessing. To evangelize “is first of all to bear witness to God revealed by Jesus Christ in the Spirit,” for the first means and path of evangelization is “to lead a profoundly Christian life” (*AG* 36, §3), to witness “an authentic Christian life” (*EN* 21 and 41; cf. also *OA* 51). Does the Church need a change in some structures? What she needs more radically – much more radically – is to become more a community of disciples: of priests, religious and lay faithful. Structures are, although necessary, extensions of men and women (cf. *SS*

---

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Editorial, “Pope of Good Promise,” *The Tablet*, March 25, 2013, 2.

24). Truly, “there is no new humanity if there are not first of all new persons renewed by Baptism and by lives lived according to the Gospel” (EN 18). For Christians, “Christ is the source and model of a renewed humanity” (AG 8; cf. DCE 31).

### THE NEED OF PRAYER

The renewed reception of *Gaudium et Spes* implies necessarily continuing conversion to God – and therefore prayer. As we read in the Pastoral Constitution, “An outstanding cause of human dignity lies in man’s call to communion with God” (GS 19, §1), to sanctity (cf. EN 41), to prayer. Christians with other believers are asked by their faith in God to pray for the salvation of the world and for the search for truth (cf. RH 14, §2; cf. PP 75).

Faith, hope and charity are required to live as Christians: the priority of faith and the primacy of charity (DCE 1), and the urgency of hope. Faith helps us recognize “the face of the Risen Lord in those who ask for our love” (Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, 14; cf. Mt 25:40). Faith and charity demands continuing prayer – and hope. Without hope we cannot journey onward in faithful love.

Prayer is an essential component of all kinds of spirituality. It is interesting to note that the Council began its work every day with the celebration of the holy Eucharist. To some experts of Vatican II, one element that makes *Gaudium et Spes* innovative is the link it makes between social action and spirituality, between justice and prayer. In the context of the social doctrine and social action, spirituality means the presence of the Holy Spirit in social action (cf. GS 21, §5). In a sense, the objective of the Pastoral Constitution is “trying to unite the life of man with the plan of God.” As St. Irenaeus says, “Christ and the Holy Spirit are the divine Persons with whom the Father governs the world.”<sup>42</sup>

### CONCLUDING COMMENTS ON *GAUDIUM ET SPES*

In our reflection we have tried to answer a few relevant questions directly connected with the Pastoral Constitution as read today. To conclude our discourse, I add a few more comments.

Re-reading *Gaudium et Spes* fifty years after Vatican II brings up understandable limitations.<sup>43</sup> The recurrent teaching of Vatican II – of GS – on the equality of all

---

<sup>42</sup> Rufo González Pérez, *Presencia del Espíritu Santo en los documentos del Vaticano II* (Madrid: Universidad Pontificia de Comillas, 1998), 28. Rufo González says that the Holy Spirit is mentioned 89 times in LG and 34 in GS. He adds that the mental scheme of Vatican II is “Everything comes from God through the mediation of the Son and in the Holy Spirit” (Ibid., 29).

<sup>43</sup> Some commentators, for instance, consider GS a bit *too optimistic*, particularly on scientific and technological progress, war, the United Nations, the arms race. Joseph Ratzinger manifests certain unease over GS, for its “almost naïve progressive optimism which seem unaware of the ambivalence of

continued through 50 years and is still relevant. Much more needs to be done by all Christians regarding the active place and participation of the lay faithful in the Church, in particular consecrated and lay women.

In the midst of huge economic developments, the poor continue to have little voice in our world and the community of faith, hope and love. The Church, which is doing much already, is asked to do more to eradicate the scandalous scourge of forced poverty.

Vatican II teachings on marriage and family are brief and understandably incomplete (*are they a bit too idealistic?*). After fifty years of Vatican II, some issues continue been hotly debated, such as divorce (*should the Church not do something more with our brothers and sisters who are divorced?*), artificial means of contraception, etc.

All things considered, *Gaudium et Spes* is without any doubt on our part a *monumental conciliar document*, which is still in need of being more fully uncovered and, above all, applied, that is, lived. The Pastoral Constitution is an original document, a novelty in the history of ecumenical councils: new purpose, new theme, new name, original structure, different magisterial style.<sup>44</sup>

*Gaudium et Spes* has been acclaimed as “a revolutionary document,” and the text that shows best “the spirit of Vatican II,” and manifests with clarity “the two qualities of the Council, namely, the pastoral dimension and ‘aggiornamento’.”<sup>45</sup> *GS* continues to be considered by many a *prophetic document* and the *signature document* of the Second Vatican Council, and the *social document* that re-launched creatively the social teachings of the Church.

*Gaudium et Spes*'s innovative anthropology continues to be significant and more so, its Christian anthropology: the absence of God is part of the modern secular culture – and crisis.

The Pastoral Constitution continues to be a *point of departure and reference* for the mission of the Church in the world today. In particular, *GS* is important and relevant for fundamental moral theology, Christian anthropology, and a very significant one for the social doctrine of the Church.<sup>46</sup>

---

all external progress.” Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, 2nd ed. (New York & Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2009), 227; cited by Peter Phillips, “Newman, Vatican II, and the Triple Office,” *New Blackfriars* 94, no. 1049 (January 2013): 103. Let me add to what Pope Francis says on this point: 50 years after Vatican II we are far from “naïve optimism,” and realistic, but always hopeful and trustful (*Evangelii Gaudium* 84; added on December 13, 2013).

<sup>44</sup> Cf. José Ma. Cirarda, “Proemio,” *Comentarios a la Constitución Gaudium et Spes* (Madrid: BAC, 1968), 149.

<sup>45</sup> Marciano Vidal, “*Gaudium et Spes* y teología moral,” 104-105.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Francisco A. Castro Pérez, “*Gaudium et Spes*: La Iglesia y la ciudad secular,” *Vida Nueva*, no. 2.792, 10-16 de Marzo, 2012, 23-30. For the Prefect of the Vatican Congregation of the Doctrine of

The heart of *Gaudium et Spes* is *the relationship of the Church with the world*. GS calls this interaction “mutual exchange” (GS 40, §4 and 44, §1 and §2). This teaching on the interaction between the Church and the world is considered as truly innovative.<sup>47</sup>

The *dialogue* with the world underlined by the Pastoral Constitution (cf. GS nos. 40-44) continues to be a service of the Church to all men and women of the world to whom the Constitution was addressed (GS 2, §2). This document reflects clearly the open, non-confrontational, non-condemnatory and sympathetic and humble attitude of the conciliar Fathers. John XXIII proposed this compassionate attitude at the beginning of the Council (cf. *Opening Speech*).

*Gaudium et Spes* is also a *meaningful text for Asia*. For theologian Felix Wilfred, GS is the most important document for the Church’s mission in Asia: for its humility, its openness to dialogue and for favoring already not only a *missio ad gentes* but also a *missio inter gentes*.<sup>48</sup>

The social causes for *justice, the poor, peace, human life, and the environment* continue to challenge our world and the Church.<sup>49</sup> GS is clearly in favour of *integral development* and the *preferential love for the poor* and needy. It favours responsible scientific and technological development, democracy, human rights, workers’ rights, and world peace.<sup>50</sup>

When all is said and done, what really matters in theology, in social ethics, in life is practice, which is the end of studying ethics and moral theology – and *Gaudium et Spes*! After all, as the Buddhist saying goes: “*To know and not to do is not yet to know.*”

The Pastoral Constitution of Vatican II is a hopeful text. Indeed, we Christians need faith and charity and the third theological virtue, hope which is the virtue of the pilgrim and “does not disappoint” (Rom 5:5), the habit that believes in a better future – a new heaven and a new earth -, and walks to that future in front of us through

---

Faith “GS is as relevant as 50 years ago” (S. E. R. Mons. Gerhard Ludwig Muller, “La vita umana nel pensiero di Benedetto XVI,” Pontifical Academy for Life XIX General Assembly on *Faith and Human Life*, Vatican City, February 22, 2013); cf. Margaret Lavin, *Vatican II Fifty Years of Evolution and Revolution in the Catholic Church* (Toronto/Ontario: Novalis Publishing, Inc., 2012), 58-60; Christopher Theobald, “O estilo pastoral do Vaticano II e sua recepção de uma criteriológia e alguns exemplos,” *Perspectiva Teológica* 44, no. 123 (2012): 217-236. Certainly, as theologian José-Román Flecha put it, GS is “a precious *vademecum* for a personal and communitarian reflection on the vocation and presence of the Church in the world” (José-Román Flecha, “Iglesia, ¿Qué dices al mundo?,” *Diario de León*, October 13, 2013).

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Marciano Vidal, “*Gaudium et Spes* y teología moral,” 119-122; Margaret Lavin, *Vatican II*, 39-48.

<sup>48</sup> Felix Wilfred, “Recepción del Vaticano II en un continente multireligioso,” *Concilium*, no. 346 (June 2012): 353-354.

<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the economic neo-liberalism, which started in the 1970s, continues today unabated Cf. Jesús Espeja, *A los 50 Años del Concilio. Camino abierto para el siglo XXI*, 113-116, 178, 279.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Josep María Rovira Belloso, “El Concilio Vaticano II. Su significación,” *Phase*, LII, no. 310 (Julio-agosto, 2012): 315-328, esp. 320.



steps of faithful love. After 50 years of its celebration these words of Vatican II ring true: “The future of humanity is in the hands of those who are capable of providing to the future generations reasons to live and to hope” (GS 31, §3). *Gaudium et Spes* continues providing today, the best reason to live and hope: journeying together by the path of love.

