

Reading the Signs of the Times through a Hermeneutics of Recognition: *Gaudium et Spes* and Its Meaning for a Learning Church

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The pastoral constitution Gaudium et Spes of Vatican II represents a significant shift for the church, not only ecclesiological but also intellectually, with deep consequences for the culture of the church and especially for Catholic institutions of higher education. This change has clear implications for the core curriculum of a learning Catholic Church—and of every learning Catholic. In the “modern cosmopolitan culture” of the church of Vatican II, the liberal arts have a central place. The ability to make a judgment on “the signs of the times” requires a cultural awareness that is the opposite of utilitarianism. Care for the “common good” requires “core knowledge” because the world—as it is presented in Gaudium et Spes—is nontransparent, ambiguous, and ever changing. In this sense the pastoral constitution is an antipositivistic manifesto for humanization that needs to be rediscovered.

Keywords: Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, education, core curriculum, recognition, liberation, humanization

Introduction: *Gaudium et Spes* and Pope Francis’ Vatican II

ANNIVERSARIES help us remember important events, but sometimes anniversaries are also about renewing old commitments. In the case of institutional anniversaries, such celebrations are

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part of the creation of an institutional memory that necessarily entails some forgetting, too—as Jesuit historian Stephen Schloesser wrote in a perceptive essay a few years ago.¹

We are beyond the fiftieth anniversary of Vatican II. Commemorations of the council’s golden anniversary were embodied—if not overshadowed—by the election of Pope Francis. However, the anniversary of Vatican II is different from the celebration of an institutional memory. Historians and theologians kept the memory of Vatican II alive before the church hierarchy decided to do so. Giuseppe Alberigo, José Oscar Beozzo, Peter Hünemann, John W. O’Malley, Gilles Routhier, Christoph Theobald, and others have had a significant impact on the role of Vatican II in the Catholic intellectual community. In the English-speaking world, for example, John O’Malley’s *What Happened at Vatican II* literally rescued the memory of Vatican II when it was on verge of being forgotten or dismissed by the magisterium.² While many theologians and lay Catholics have celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of Vatican II unapologetically and explicitly, the institutional Catholic Church as such barely showed any direct signs of a desire to remember Vatican II before the election of Pope Francis.

Some in the church still hold the legacy of Vatican II captive in the battle over its interpretations (a battle that in the United States of America is frequently a subset of the ideology of the “culture wars”). Pope Francis has not changed that, even though he is clearly a “Vatican II pope.” Biographically, Jorge Mario Bergoglio is the first pope who was ordained a priest after Vatican II, in 1969, and in a sense he is the first pope of the post-Vatican II church.³

It is worth asking: what has changed about the role of Vatican II in the Catholic Church with the election of Pope Francis? Many of the changes we have seen since March 13, 2013, are related to the role of *Gaudium et Spes*, the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. It is now clear that the pontificate of Francis has brought about one of the most

¹ See Stephen Schloesser, “Against *Forgetting*: Memory, History, Vatican II,” *Theological Studies* 67 (2006): 275–319.

² John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

³ See Elisabetta Piqué, *Pope Francis: Life and Revolution* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2014); Austen Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope* (New York: Holt, 2014); Paul Vallely, *Pope Francis: Untying the Knots* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013). For Francis’ relationship with Vatican II, see Massimo Faggioli, *Pope Francis: Tradition in Transition* (New York: Paulist Press, 2015), 16–17; and Faggioli, *A Council for the Global Church: Receiving Vatican II in History* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 331–35.

surprising reversals of fortune regarding the theological legacy of an ecumenical council, and that is especially true of the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, whose history at the council and reception after it are particularly meaningful in understanding the whole of Vatican II.

Benedict XVI quoted *Gaudium et Spes* during his pontificate, but in Ratzinger's reception of Vatican II the pastoral constitution never had the role it has had in Francis'.⁴ *Gaudium et Spes* is one of the council documents quoted by Pope Francis in the key moments of his pontificate, together with *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, John XXIII's opening speech of the Second Vatican Council on October 11, 1962. The renaissance of *Gaudium et Spes* is visible especially in the most important acts of Pope Francis: in the exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013); in the bull of indiction for the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, *Misericordiae Vultus* (March 13, 2015); and in the apostolic postsynodal exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (March 19, 2016).⁵ Francis' pontificate is consistent with the role of *Gaudium et Spes* in Latin American Catholicism over the last fifty years, and there is little doubt that *Gaudium et Spes* is one of the key documents of Vatican II guiding our understanding of Pope Francis and his relationship with both the council itself and the postconciliar period, even if Francis' use of the pastoral constitution is often mediated by other sources of the magisterium.⁶ The influence of *Gaudium et Spes* on Bergoglio-Francis has more to do with a way of thinking than with the content of the document itself.

⁴ For Joseph Ratzinger's approach to *Gaudium et Spes*, see his introduction to the first of the two volumes dedicated to Vatican II, in the series of his complete works: "Vorwort," in *Zur Lehre des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils: Formulierung-Vermittlung-Deutung*, Joseph Ratzinger Gesammelte Schriften, vol. 7/1 (Freiburg i.B.: Herder, 2012), 5–9, esp. 6–7. See also Carlos Schickendantz, "¿Una transformación metodológica inadvertida? La novedad introducida por *Gaudium et Spes* en los escritos de Joseph Ratzinger," *Teología y Vida* 57, no. 1 (2016): 9–37; Christoph Theobald, *La réception du concile Vatican II*, vol. 1, *Accéder à la source* (Paris: Cerf, 2009), 641–54, esp. 652–53.

⁵ In the notes to *Evangelii Gaudium* there are twenty quotations from Vatican II. Three quotations from *Gaudium et Spes* (§§25, 36, 53) form the basis of §115 of *Evangelii Gaudium* on the key "concept of culture." The first five quotations of the bull *Misericordiae Vultus* are from Vatican II (*Dei Verbum* §4; *Lumen Gentium* §1; *Gaudium et Spes* §15; the opening speech of John XXIII, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*; and Paul VI's allocution in the last public session). In *Amoris Laetitia* there are nineteen quotations of *Gaudium et Spes*, the most quoted document of Vatican II in the postsynodal exhortation on love in the family.

⁶ See Victor Codina, paper presented at the Continental Congress of Theology, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 7–11 October 2012, published in Italian as "La Chiesa in America Latina: questioni aperte," *Il Regno—documenti*, May 2013, 185–92, esp. 188. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, §51, "signs of the times" is cited from Paul VI's encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, not *Gaudium et Spes*.

So, what is the meaning of this new role of the pastoral constitution of Vatican II for theology today? What is the meaning of *Gaudium et Spes* for “the church in the modern world” of today, a world that is significantly different from the world of 1965? What is its meaning for those who live and work in Catholic culture and especially in Catholic higher education?

The Message to the World and *Gaudium et Spes*: “Alpha and Omega” of the Council

The legacy of *Gaudium et Spes* is tied to the legacy of Vatican II as a whole, and vice versa. There is a historical and a theological case to be made for this. From a historical standpoint, the message of *Gaudium et Spes* about the church in the modern world can be seen as the “alpha and omega” of the council, since the theology of French Dominican Marie-Dominique Chenu, one of the theological minds that prepared Vatican II, is evident at the beginning and the end of the council.⁷ The message of Vatican II is already clear in the *Message to the World*, the first document approved and published by the council fathers, one week after the opening of the council, on October 20, 1962.⁸ And the message is clear in the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, the last document approved by the council, on December 7, 1965.⁹ In this sense Vatican II unfolded under the macro theme of ecclesiology and modernity, and the conciliar corpus exhibits a *Ringkomposition*: Vatican II’s final document, *Gaudium et Spes*, goes back to its starting point, the *Message to the World*.

Moreover, there is a particular theological relationship between *Gaudium et Spes* and Vatican II from the standpoint of the reception of Vatican II. In our cultural context the immediate and unconscious connection made between Vatican II and “the sixties” (used pejoratively) has misrepresented *Gaudium et Spes* and everything the pastoral constitution stands for. The church in the modern world, and everything that is part of that relationship, are sometimes cast as the beginning of the end for real Catholic tradition—

⁷ See Giovanni Turbanti, “Il ruolo del p. D. Chenu nell’elaborazione della costituzione *Gaudium et Spes*,” in *Marie-Dominique Chenu: Moyen-Âge et modernité* (Paris: Le Saulchoir, 1997), 173–212.

⁸ See *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, vol. 1/1 (Città del Vaticano: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1970–99), 230–32; Andrea Riccardi, “The Tumultuous Opening Days of the Council,” in *History of Vatican II*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 2:53–54.

⁹ See Giovanni Turbanti, *Un concilio per il mondo moderno: La redazione della costituzione pastorale “Gaudium et spes” del Vaticano II* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2000).

unless *Gaudium et Spes* is read in firm continuity with past tradition understood as unchanging and immutable.¹⁰

Gaudium et Spes is, for better or for worse, the epitome of the council. Thus it is the target of “anti-Vatican II sentiment,” which is expressed more with dismissal and contempt than through theological critique. The cultural turn interpreted by Vatican II—not produced, but *interpreted* by Vatican II—was largely overshadowed, in the impression of public opinion, but sadly also in the culture of some leaders of the church, by the idea that Catholic theology was an accomplice in the destruction of the old moral system and that *Gaudium et Spes* was the manifesto of that—almost like the Civil Constitution of the Clergy during the French Revolution. That constitution subordinated the Roman Catholic Church in France to the French government; in a similar way, the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of 1965 allegedly subordinated Catholic theology to the relativistic, materialistic, atheistic, and pantheistic culture of the sixties.

Now it is clear that *Gaudium et Spes* is the most perfect case of a problem in the reception of a document of the Second Vatican Council—a reception divided along theological fault lines overlaid with a theological-political rejection of Vatican II in general and of the document that opens Catholic theology to a truly global church in particular.¹¹ As a European who migrated to America a few years ago, I have the impression that this problem is particularly evident in the Northern Hemisphere and especially in the American Catholic Church—and it is clear that the problematic reception of *Gaudium et Spes* in the United States is part of the problematic relationship between some sectors of the Catholic Church in the United States and Pope Francis.

This is why it will be necessary, at some point, to write a history of the theological reception of Vatican II, and especially of the reception of *Gaudium et Spes* and its role in the culture of Catholic higher education. This issue is political, but first of all it is theological. Therefore as a Catholic theologian I am part of the picture. Catholic colleges and universities are part of this picture. That is why it is time to offer some thoughts on the meaning of the pastoral constitution for Catholic theology, and indirectly for Catholic schools and universities, where theology and religious studies are (still) a fundamental part of the core curriculum.

¹⁰ An example is Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering, introduction to *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition*, ed. Lamb and Levering (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 11.

¹¹ See Massimo Faggioli, “Vatican II: The History and the ‘Narratives,’” *Theological Studies* 73, no. 4 (Dec. 2012): 749–67.

The Ecclesiology of Vatican II and a “Hermeneutics of Recognition”

The interpretation of the relationship between modern culture and Christian anthropology, between the church and the world, is at the center of the divide between two tendencies. Avery Dulles, Joseph Komonchak, and in recent times Ormond Rush, have cast light on the differences between the “neo-Augustinian” tendency on one side and the “neo-Thomist” on the other. Rush in particular has described the two tendencies recently in relation to the different anthropologies necessary for a correct “hermeneutics of the authors” of Vatican II. In Rush’s words, “The Augustinian school is wanting to set church and world in a situation of rivals; it sees the world in a negative light; evil and sin so abound in the world that the church should be always suspicious and distrustful of it. Any openness to the world would be ‘naïve optimism.’”¹² In Avery Dulles’ description, the neo-Augustinian tendency views the church as far removed from a sinful world: “The Church as an island of grace in a world given over to sin.”¹³ In this perspective, a study of the use of Augustine and of Augustinianism at Vatican II and especially in *Gaudium et Spes* would help us nuance the opposition between the two tendencies.¹⁴ It would also tell us that acknowledging the role of Augustine and Augustinianism at Vatican II does not necessarily contradict the ecclesiological shift *ad extra* that took place at Vatican II (and in theology even before Vatican II)—a shift that was endorsed also by those who are usually and simplistically identified with an Augustinian skepticism vis-à-vis the theology of Vatican II (Joseph Ratzinger, to name just one).

In fact, the core theology of *Gaudium et Spes* is much more than the debate between neo-Augustinians and neo-Thomists, and an oversimplified characterization of the divide between the two trends can misrepresent the meaning of the text. The theological method of “the signs of the times” did not receive the enthusiastic approval of the progressive majority at

¹² See Ormond Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II: Some Hermeneutical Principles* (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2004), 15.

¹³ Avery Dulles, “The Reception of Vatican II at the Extraordinary Synod of 1985,” in *The Reception of Vatican II*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo, Jean-Pierre Jossua, and Joseph A. Komonchak (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1987), 353.

¹⁴ See Anthony Dupont, “The Authority of Augustine of Hippo at the Second Vatican Council: A Comparative Analysis of the Use of Augustine in the Preparatory and the Promulgated Texts,” in *La théologie catholique entre intransigeance et renouveau: La réception des mouvements préconciliaires à Vatican II*, ed. Gilles Routhier, Philippe J. Roy, and Karim Schelkens (Louvain-la-Neuve: Collège Érasme; Leuven: Universiteitsbibliotheek, 2011), 11–48.

Vatican II.¹⁵ As Bishop McGrath (one of the most important contributors to the drafting of *Gaudium et Spes*) wrote a few months after the end of Vatican II, “Never before had a council addressed the secular aspect of Christian life in this broad and systematic way. . . . The traditionalists looked at the proposal with suspicion and with a humorous disdain. . . . But the progressive theologians [who drafted *Lumen Gentium*] also rebelled against all that could amount to an empirical consideration of the world. They insisted that the council had to proceed with the accepted theological method.”¹⁶

Gaudium et Spes manifests the “Copernican revolution” of Catholic ecclesiology for the relations between the church and the world:

Inspired by no earthly ambition, the Church seeks but a solitary goal: to carry forward the work of Christ under the lead of the befriending Spirit. And Christ entered this world to give witness to the truth, to rescue and not to sit in judgment, to serve and not to be served.¹⁷

What follows, in §4, is the best-known passage of the beginning of the pastoral constitution. It includes the expression “the signs of the times”—one of the hermeneutical principles of Vatican II:

To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. . . . Today, the human race is involved in a new stage of history. Profound and rapid changes are spreading by degrees around the whole world.

Discerning “the signs of the times” is not just about being aware of world events; the signs are a new “semiotics of time.” In other words, “the signs of the times” reflect the recognition that there are facts of history that a credible presentation of the faith cannot dismiss without losing its credibility.¹⁸ This is the real meaning of the qualification in the second sentence of §4 (my emphasis): “In language *intelligible* to each generation, the Church can

¹⁵ See Faggioli, *A Council for the Global Church*, 121–41.

¹⁶ See Marcos McGrath, “La genesis de *Gaudium et Spes*,” *Mensaje* 15, no. 153 (October 1966): 495–502, at 496 (my translation from the Spanish).

¹⁷ Pope Paul VI, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, December 7, 1965, §3, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

¹⁸ See Hans-Joachim Sander, “Theologischer Kommentar zur Pastoralkonstitution über die Kirche in der Welt von heute,” in *Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, ed. Bernd Jochen Hilberath and Peter Hünemann (Freiburg i.B.: Herder, 2005), 5:717; for Sander’s entire commentary, see 581–886.

respond to the perennial questions ... about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other.”

From the standpoint of the theological profession, *Gaudium et Spes* presents us with a challenge that is historical and theological: in other words, it puts the role of historical theologians at the center of the issue of the “church vis-à-vis the world.” In this sense, *Gaudium et Spes* is rescued from the apparent banality of its text, which tries to capture the nature of the “modern world” like a single frame in a developing action, giving particular emphasis to the issue of knowledge—of technology, social sciences, and history:

Today’s spiritual agitation and the changing conditions of life are part of a broader and deeper revolution. As a result of the latter, intellectual formation is ever increasingly based on the mathematical and natural sciences and on those dealing with man himself, while in the practical order the technology which stems from these sciences takes on mounting importance. This scientific spirit has a new kind of impact on the cultural sphere and on modes of thought. Technology is now transforming the face of the earth, and is already trying to master outer space. To a certain extent, the human intellect is also broadening its dominion over time: over the past by means of historical knowledge; over the future by the art of projecting and by planning. Advances in biology, psychology, and the social sciences not only bring men hope of improved self-knowledge; in conjunction with technical methods, they are helping men exert direct influence on the life of social groups. (GS §5)

Catholic theology here is not discovering anything new—history, society, science, change. What Catholic theology *is* doing here is *recognizing* something that it knew existed all along, but that was for a long time cast aside as irrelevant or an accident of history.

Gaudium et Spes recapitulates the paradigmatic shift of Vatican II here. I want to mention the most important conciliar parallel: in the history of Vatican II the pastoral constitution was promulgated two weeks after *Dei Verbum*, the *Constitution on Divine Revelation*, but the drafting of *Gaudium et Spes* had a very different history within Vatican II. During the preparation of Vatican II, a document on the church and the modern world was not part of the plan. Just as was the case for *Dei Verbum*, for *Gaudium et Spes* history was not an accident. The big question posed anew by Vatican II is about Christianity and time: *Can* Christianity be modern or up-to-date? *Should* Christianity be modern or up-to-date? Or should it be anti-modern? What are the criteria for solving this issue?

The signs of the times are not just one more source for the formation of theologians. The theology of “the signs of the times” belongs to the issue of the *modus procedendi* of theology, because that is Jesus’ style, his *modus*

agendi and his *modus conversationis*.¹⁹ The constitution *Gaudium et Spes* does not offer ready-made solutions, but a *modus procedendi* for the church facing the future. The consequences of this reorientation of theology for the cultural options for the church are immediate. It is the end of nineteenth-century antimodernism for the Catholic Church. The Catholic “march” toward modern culture was long, and until recently Catholics were not even supposed to have cultures (plural). After the shock of the revolutions of the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, modernity was seen as the fruit of the separation of the world from the moral guidance of the only true church. Catholics were allowed to entertain commerce with the modern world only *de facto*.

Gaudium et Spes signifies the growth of Vatican II in understanding a new method of doing theology during the drafting of the document between the spring and the fall of 1965.²⁰ It represents a shift that marks the beginning of a “world Church”: this ends the rhetoric of “resentment” toward the modern world.²¹ In this there is a transition from a Catholic “utopia” (a non-place) to a church in “heterotopia.” Using Michel Foucault’s terminology, German theologian Hans-Joachim Sander sees in the church of *Gaudium et Spes* a heterotopia, like a ship in the modern world creating a different (but not parallel or separate) space.²²

The shift here is from disavowal to recognition. The key principle of Vatican II in general and of *Gaudium et Spes* in particular is, in the words of Austrian Catholic ethicist Ingeborg Gabriel, the “hermeneutics of recognition” (*Hermeneutik der Anerkennung*, quoting Paul Ricoeur’s *Parcours de la reconnaissance*):

The goal of this hermeneutic of recognition is not the exclusion of others, but the inclusion as much as possible. . . . Recognition does not mean rejection in principle, nor uncritical acceptance. . . . Recognition means a positive “setting yourself in a relation with the Other” (*ein positives Sich-In-Beziehung-Setzen zum Anderen*). [...] These others are separated brothers and sisters of other Churches, faithful of other religions and other fellow men and women that, even if they are non-believers, hold on to fundamental human rights.²³

¹⁹ See Christoph Theobald, *Le concile Vatican II: Quel avenir?* (Paris: Cerf, 2015), 159–80.

²⁰ See Theobald, *Le concile Vatican II*, 228.

²¹ See Sander, “Theologischer Kommentar zur Pastoralkonstitution,” 865.

²² Sander, “Theologischer Kommentar zur Pastoralkonstitution,” 867–68.

²³ Ingeborg Gabriel, “Christliche Sozialethik in der Moderne: Der kaum rezepierte Ansatz von *Gaudium et Spes*,” in *Erinnerung an die Zukunft: Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil*, ed. Jan-Heiner Tück (Freiburg i.B.: Herder, 2012), 612. See Paul Ricoeur, *Parcours de la Reconnaissance—Trois Études* (Paris: Folio, 2005). On the idea of “recognition,” see

This recognition is not just an extension of the requirement of tolerance in a society that has become more diverse and plural; it is a requirement of a gospel correctly understood. Gabriel continues:

This recognition builds the foundation of the unity of which the Church is “sacrament” and “instrument.” In this unity the ethics of the Gospel becomes real, as an ethics marked by justice and love extended even to the love for the enemies.²⁴

From the Recognition to Recognitions

What are the more specific recognitions that derive from this “hermeneutics of recognition” for the church and for Catholic theology?

First, a “hermeneutics of recognition” means for Catholic theology recognizing the present cultural horizon as *constitutive* for theology and the magisterium of the church not only in terms of *intelligibility*, but most of all in terms of the *validity* of the theological content. The fields of theology and science are most directly touched by this hermeneutics of recognition. For example, it is interesting to note that the only indirect mention of Galileo in official church documents between 1633 and 1992 (when John Paul II rehabilitated the scientist) is in note 63 to *Gaudium et Spes*.²⁵

Second, a “hermeneutics of recognition” means accepting the fact that we live in an “age of criticism/critical approach”: “In this age of critical approach the need emerges to lay new foundations for the moral-political but also religious horizon of meaning in the context of the modern sense of history marked by autonomy and by the experience of rationality.”²⁶ This entails a theological and ecclesial context for the church in a postmodernity that is not only characterized by modernization, but also consists both of ruptures in the tradition and of a culture of “communicative dissent”—in society at large and within the church.²⁷

Axel Honneth’s reflection on “Anerkennung”: *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1995; original German edition, 1992).

²⁴ Gabriel, “Christliche Sozialethik in der Moderne,” 612.

²⁵ See Alberto Melloni, *Galileo al concilio: Storia di una citazione e della sua ombra* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 2013).

²⁶ Hans Schelkshorn, “Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil als kirchlicher Diskurs über die Moderne: Ein philosophischer Beitrag zur Frage nach der Hermeneutik des Konzils,” in Tück, *Erinnerung an die Zukunft*, 71.

²⁷ See Franz-Xaver Kaufmann, *Kirche in der ambivalenten Moderne* (Freiburg i.B.: Herder, 2012), 170–78 (“Modernisierung, Traditionsabbruch, kommunikativer Dissens als Kontext”).

Third, a “hermeneutics of recognition” means a new idea of culture that calls for the end of a walled-in Catholic “subculture” and the beginning of the end of the alternative between a “subculture” (typical of a marginalized Catholicism) and the “dominant culture” (typical of European Christendom). The beginning of a multicultural world means the end of a juxtaposition of cultures (*Nebeneinander der Kulturen*) and the recognition of the “cross-fertilization” of cultures.²⁸ Even though it has been suggested that *Gaudium et Spes* is overly optimistic about modern culture, the pastoral constitution sees clearly the ambivalence and underside of modernity, as we can read in §4: “Never has the human race enjoyed such an abundance of wealth, resources and economic power, and yet a huge proportion of the world’s citizens are still tormented by hunger and poverty, while countless numbers suffer from total illiteracy. Never before has man had so keen an understanding of freedom, yet at the same time new forms of social and psychological slavery make their appearance.”

On the other hand, Vatican II is less multicultural than we might expect: a certain Euro-Western canon is still very visible there. For us, now, it is not about accepting a-critically a given multicultural paradigm; it is about understanding the council’s change of horizons with respect to the relationship between Catholic culture and culture as such.²⁹ The biggest shift here, however, is not from pessimism to optimism, but from a canonical idea of “culture”—one singular Catholic culture—to a more pluralistic and historical-critical idea of cultures—plural—in the global church. In this there is a new and problematic appreciation of the relationship between culture and universality. In the words of Ingeborg Gabriel,

Although modernity aims at universality, it is in fact not universal but also particular. Just as in every culture, the advantages and disadvantages of modernity in terms of the gospel are to be distinguished. In fact, today there is not a juxtaposition of cultures, but an entanglement, penetration and at best fertilization between different forms of culture, while globalizing modernity remains hegemonic.³⁰

²⁸ Gabriel, “Christliche Sozialethik in der Moderne,” 617.

²⁹ On the “Kulturoptimismus” of Vatican II, see Albert Gerhards, “Gipfelpunkt und Quelle: Intention und Rezeption der Liturgiekonstitution Sacrosanctum Concilium,” in Tück, *Erinnerung an die Zukunft*, 145.

³⁰ Gabriel, “Christliche Sozialethik in der Moderne,” 617: “Die Moderne zielt zwar auf Universalität, ist aber faktisch nicht universal sondern ebenso partikulär wie andere Kulturen, deren Vor- und Nachteile im Sinne des Evangeliums zu unterscheiden sind, wie dies eben *Gaudium et Spes* für die Moderne unternimmt. *De facto* besteht heute nicht ein Nebeneinander von Kulturen, sondern eine Verschränkung, Durchdringung

This brings us to the fourth point about Catholicism and globalization, in terms of the global responsibility of the church toward the world and humankind. The hermeneutics of recognition means a new way of articulating the global-universal claim of the Catholic Church in terms of humanization (GS §11). *Humanization* is part of our journey to the kingdom. *Gaudium et Spes*, §40, talks about heavenly and earthly citizenship while talking about church and world in terms of *mutua relatio*—dialogical relationship. In the words of the most recent commentator on the constitution, German theologian Hans-Joachim Sander:

The representation of salvation means not only a communication of God's grace, but also a pastoral act. It becomes real when we reinforce human dignity and we emphasize the meaning of everyday life for salvation. It is evidence of the supernatural nature of the Church when the Church contributes to more humane life conditions for human beings.³¹

Fifth, a hermeneutics of recognition means recognizing not only that modernity is carried culturally on the shoulders of Christianity, but also that during the era of Western modernity Christianity is exiting from itself. This should not be another occasion to lament the loss of a golden age, but the opportunity to remember that we have to put the church squarely *in* the world: the world *is* the place of the gospel. In a lecture delivered at a meeting of the Roman Catholic-Lutheran World Federation in Sweden in September 1968, a young Walter Kasper used the constitution on divine revelation *Dei Verbum* and the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (especially §§40, 44, and 62) to articulate the relationship between the gospel and the world—the world as a *locus theologicus*, that is, a theological criterion:

We meet the Gospel not only listening to Scripture, tradition, and the magisterium, but also, of necessity, by listening to the world. . . . Concrete human history is a constitutive part of revelation. We do not only meet the Gospel in the context of historical circumstances from which we could detach it. History is not the context: it is the text itself. The Gospel is not a doctrine without history, nor a universal dialectic of existence, but it is connected to a concrete history that happened only once. . . . This *concrete* world, which changes historically, is constitutively part of the event of the Gospel. The world is a *locus theologicus*, that is, a criterion to know if the Gospel is adequately implemented.³²

und im besten Fall Befruchtung unterschiedlicher Kulturformen, wobei eine sich globalisierende Moderne hegemonial bleibt."

³¹ Sander, "Theologischer Kommentar zur Pastoralkonstitution," 759.

³² Walter Kasper, "Il mondo come luogo del Vangelo," in *Fede e storia* (Brescia: Queriniana, 1975; original German edition, 1970), 162–63, 167 (my translation). On the recent

The Recognition and the Knowledge of the Church

Ultimately, the reason for the “hermeneutics of recognition” is the desire of the church to follow the example of Jesus, leaving behind—as much as possible—other examples that do not correspond to his. This was the meaning of “pastoral” at Vatican II. “Pastorality” is the theological expression for the spiritual rediscovery of the concrete story of Jesus in the life of the church. Christoph Theobald spoke of the texts of Vatican II “comme initiation d’un processus théologique d’apprentissage” (Vatican II as the initiation of a theological learning process).³³ According to Theobald the constitutions *Gaudium et Spes* and *Dei Verbum* on divine Revelation build the connection between the pastoral mission of the Church and the sources of this mission in the Scriptures and especially in the gospel.

Learning from the example set by the life of Jesus, how do we make the transition to the concrete life of the church? What are the consequences of the recognitions identified by *Gaudium et Spes*? What does that recognition mean for our current cultural horizon, the relationship between the culture of criticism and dissent and the issue of subcultures and universality, the desire for humanization in the world as the place of the gospel and the gospel’s role in realizing it?

In light of the “hermeneutics of recognition,” the *what* for a learning church is a new understanding of the proper but not exclusive role that the Greek-Latin paradigm should play in a theology that seeks a truly universal Catholicity. This is not only because the appropriation of that Greek-Latin paradigm by the Catholic churches of Western Europe and North America is questionable (especially if it is understood as an exclusive appropriation). In the programmatic document of his pontificate, the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis elaborates the issue in a way that differs significantly from Benedict XVI’s “Regensburg lecture” of September 12, 2006, in which Benedict identified the theological tradition with the Jewish/Greek tradition.³⁴ There is a very clear continuity between *Gaudium et Spes* and *Evangelii Gaudium*:

position of Walter Kasper on the theological method of *Gaudium et Spes*, see Carlos Schickendantz, “Autoridad teológica de los acontecimientos históricos: Perplejidades sobre un lugar teológico,” *Teología* 115 (2014): 157–83, esp. 163–65.

³³ Theobald, *La réception du concile Vatican II*, 698.

³⁴ For a comparison between Benedict XVI and his predecessor regarding the relationship between faith and cultures (plural), see John Paul II, encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, September 14, 1998, esp. §§3 and 70–72, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html.

We would not do justice to the logic of the incarnation if we thought of Christianity as monocultural and monotonous. While it is true that some cultures have been closely associated with the preaching of the Gospel and the development of Christian thought, the revealed message is not identified with any of them; its content is transcultural.³⁵

The “hermeneutics of recognition” is necessary because of the shift, described by Bernard Lonergan in his famous 1968 lecture, “Thomism for Tomorrow,” from a “classicist” culture to a world marked by “historical consciousness.”³⁶

Vatican II initiated this shift intellectually—but we should remember that the council barely initiated it at the institutional level.³⁷ *Gaudium et Spes* takes the “present time as *locus theologicus*,” with these key consequences for the culture of the church and its learning:³⁸

- a. The church looks into history and the present to understand the gospel more deeply—that is, where the gospel already exists even without the church, and where the church can recognize it and be inspired by it.
- b. The assumption that the church can announce the gospel only in the language and context of today belongs to the shared commitments of Vatican II; the discourse on contextuality and inculturation at Vatican II begins with the opening speech of John XXIII on October 11, 1962, is received in the *Message to the World* a few days later, and is given full development in *Gaudium et Spes* four years later.
- c. The church believes in the ability of the gospel to sustain the encounter with the present times: in the opening speech, *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, John XXIII said that prophets of gloom “behave as though at the time of former councils everything was a full triumph for the Christian idea and life and for proper religious liberty”; church history reassures us about the mythical nature of the past golden ages.

³⁵ Pope Francis, apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, November 24, 2013, §117, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

³⁶ Bernard Lonergan, “The Future of Thomism,” in *A Second Collection: Papers by Bernard E. F. Lonergan, SJ*, ed. William F. J. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrrell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 43–53.

³⁷ See Massimo Faggioli, “Institutions of Episcopal Synodality-Collegiality after Vatican II: The Decree ‘Christus Dominus’ and the Agenda for Synodality-Collegiality in the 21st Century,” *The Jurist* 64, no. 2 (2004): 224–46; and Faggioli, “The Roman Curia at and after Vatican II: Legal-Rational or Theological Reform?,” *Theological Studies* 76, no. 3 (2015): 550–71.

³⁸ Regina Polak and Martin Jäggle, “Gegenwart als locus theologicus: Für eine migrations-sensible Theologie im Anschluss an *Gaudium et Spes*,” in Tüick, *Erinnerung an die Zukunft*, 670–98.

- d. In many cases the church needs the help of experts to understand the world of today—in other words, the church needs to humbly acknowledge its ignorance on some issues.
- e. The church accepts the fact that it is the task of the whole people of God—but especially of church leaders and theologians—to listen before making a judgment on the signs of the times.
- f. The church offers a clear *liberationist* perspective—theology as liberation from modern forms of slavery and oppression.

These consequences have clear implications for the core curriculum of a learning Catholic Church—and of every learning Catholic. In this “modern cosmopolitan culture” of the church of Vatican II, the liberal arts have a central place. This is not something that concerns only the Ivy League.³⁹ Catholic universities find themselves at a crossroads where different cultures meet: those identified by John O’Malley in his classic *Four Cultures of the West*—prophetic, academic, humanistic, and artistic—are all facing the challenge of what Francis calls in the encyclical *Laudato Si’* the “technocratic paradigm.”⁴⁰ *Gaudium et Spes* reminds us of the need to consider the link between humanistic education and the common good. The ability to make a judgment on “the signs of the times” requires a cultural awareness that is the opposite of utilitarianism. Care for the “common good” requires “core knowledge” because the world—as it is presented in *Gaudium et Spes*—is nontransparent, ambiguous, and ever changing. In this sense the pastoral constitution is an anti-positivistic manifesto: “We need as never before ‘discernment-judgment’ as a fundamental ‘posture’ of faith.”⁴¹

The council praised conscience as “the secret core and the sanctuary of the human person” (GS §16), and this praise acknowledges the need for care for the formation of conscience. The ethics of *humanization* in the church of Vatican II requires of its leaders a certain *humanistic* culture that is different from modern secular humanism (the word “humanism” appears in the documents of Vatican II three times, once in a positive sense

³⁹ See Jackson Lears’ review of William Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life* (New York: Free Press, 2014): Lears, “A Place and Time Apart: The Liberal Arts vs. Neoliberalism,” *Commonweal*, May 1, 2015, 14–21.

⁴⁰ See John W. O’Malley, *Four Cultures of the West* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁴¹ Theobald, *La réception du concile Vatican II*, 786.

and twice in a negative one, in *Gaudium et Spes*, §§7, 55, and 56; the word “human,” *humanus*, on the other hand, appears over 200 times).⁴²

The *what* of the learning church leads us to the fifth point: the issue of *who*. The hermeneutics of recognition means the recognition of new subjects and their voices: women, young people, the poor, and other cultures in a pluralistic world. Their voices are to be recognized as voices in the modern world (as the language of *Gaudium et Spes* indicates) as well as in the church of today (a point that is more evident in post-Vatican II theology than in the text of the pastoral constitution itself). *Gaudium et Spes* is addressed to all men and women of goodwill, setting a new stage for a church that teaches but also learns.

How is this church learning? As a church that cherishes the poor and its own poverty in humility, the church envisioned by *Gaudium et Spes* operates in the world of knowledge with *sobriety* (not addicted to spiritual or cultural enhancers), *austerity* (disciplined and aware of its limits), *simplicity* (accessible), mental *agility*, intellectual *chastity* (able to distinguish between good and bad traveling companions), and cultural *magnanimity and generosity* (willing to serve without compensation or recognition).

This hermeneutics of recognition means, for the *where* of a learning church, going to the peripheries—as Pope Francis emphasized repeatedly and especially in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. *Gaudium et Spes*, §§4–9, offers a broader picture and takes up the ambivalence of modernity, but this ambivalence does not replace the fundamental solidarity of the church “with humankind and its history.”

The Legacy of *Gaudium et Spes*, or, Is Vatican II Still Worth Considering?

Jesuit historian Stephen Schloesser recently wrote a provocative essay, “Dancing on the Edge of the Volcano’: Biopolitics and What Happened after Vatican II,” that offers a critical assessment of the legacy of Vatican II in the tumultuous postconciliar period, focusing especially on the advent of “life issues” and more generally of “biopolitics”—that is, issues of gender, sexuality, eugenics, marriage, family, celibacy, race, the morality of new weapons, and new warfare. In the conclusion of his essay Schloesser writes:

The years 1962–1965 stand as a fulcrum. When we look at December 1965 from the political vantage point, the Council appears to have concluded an

⁴² See John O’Malley, “A Lost Tradition Unwittingly Recovered: The Humanistic Spirituality of Vatican II,” forthcoming in *Theological Studies*. On *Gaudium et Spes* and humanism, see O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 266–68.

armistice with modernity. However, looking at the same moment from the biopolitical perspective, the Council seems to have been caught off-guard, struggling to keep up with rapid currents outstripping its capacity to make sense. One way of historically interpreting this seeming paradox is that biopolitical issues in 1965 had taken over the recently vacated space once occupied by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century political issues. Even as the Council euphorically celebrated its peace with the past, it unknowingly danced on the edge of a volcano.⁴³

The world of 2015 is indubitably different from the world of 1965, and the biopolitical shift may not have been the decisive shift. We could now be undergoing yet another major shift, from the biopolitical perspective to the perspectives of the Global South.

But the most important response to the argument that Vatican II struggled to keep up with a rapidly changing world is that what we mean by “modern world” between 1965 and 2015 undermines Vatican II only if we take Vatican II as a paradigm and not as a paradigmatic event—something that changed not theological propositions, but the *method* of doing theology.⁴⁴ *Gaudium et Spes* offers not a set of predefined answers, but a provisional assessment and a pedagogy, a *modus procedendi* able to address the new issues, with a central role for the constitutions *Dei Verbum* and *Gaudium et Spes*.⁴⁵

One of the most important commentators on Vatican II in the last decade, German dogmatician Peter Hünermann, recently published the essay “What Did Vatican II Say?,” which echoes Karl Rahner’s question in a famous lecture delivered in Rome in December 1965, at the end of Vatican II. In this essay Hünermann offers a very effective summary of the teaching of Vatican II in terms of a fundamental reorientation of Catholic theology. In particular he says of the teaching of Vatican II in light of the changes in the position of the church in a pluralistic world:

The statements of the Second Vatican Council derive their plausibility from this new situation. They become responsible affirmations. This is because

⁴³ Stephen R. Schloesser, “‘Dancing on the Edge of the Volcano’: Biopolitics and What Happened after Vatican II,” in *From Vatican II to Pope Francis: Charting a Catholic Future*, ed. Paul Crowley, SJ (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014), 3–26.

⁴⁴ See Lieven Boeve, “Une histoire de changement et conflit des paradigmes théologiques? Vatican II et sa réception entre continuité et discontinuité,” in Routhier, Roy, and Schelkens, *La théologie catholique entre intransigeance et renouveau*, 355–66; Jared Wicks, *Doing Theology* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2009).

⁴⁵ On this, see Theobald, *La réception du concile Vatican II*, 787.

even faith statements must be based on their credibility. This is their *ratio fidei*, a responsible and thus reasonable belief.⁴⁶

In this moment in time in our culture, the legacy of *Gaudium et Spes* represents a very delicate inheritance—not just as regards the survival of the legacy of Vatican II, but also with respect to the survival of a Catholicism that is able to interact with a modern and postmodern social imaginary.

It is a particularly delicate inheritance for the Catholic Church and Catholic higher education. “Common good” and “universal common good” are extremely difficult cases to make without the ecclesial and magisterial reception of *Gaudium et Spes*. The crisis of the idea of a “common good,” and especially of the legitimacy of the politics of the common good—a crisis that is evident in both the radical-progressive and traditionalist circles within some quarters of contemporary Catholicism—is a product of the cynicism about Vatican II and of the dismissal of *Gaudium et Spes* in particular.⁴⁷ Without the universal-cosmological worldview of the pastoral constitution, modernity easily becomes the triumph of identitarian and sectarian narratives. In the words of Italian theologian Pierangelo Sequeri, “The anthropological narrative, in today’s mass narcissism, does not create democracy out of differences, but rather out of the obsessive micro-conflict of identity.”⁴⁸

There is a central theological-political element in the culture of *Gaudium et Spes* that has vast consequences for the church and for the idea of Catholic education today: Vatican II (and *Gaudium et Spes* especially) receives and accepts elements from a “modern cosmopolitan culture” that derive from *both* the Christian tradition and a secular modernity that Christianity itself helped create, by engendering the idea of an international legal order and the ethics of global solidarity. In light of the signs of our times, today at the beginning of the twenty-first century, “the acknowledgment of Vatican II as a central moment in modern cosmopolitanism has lost nothing of its relevance [...] the moral and political universal perspectives of Vatican II come from a

⁴⁶ Peter Hünermann, “Die zentrale theologischen Aussagen des Konzils,” in *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil: Impulse und Perspektiven*, ed. Dirk Ansorge (Münster: Aschendorff, 2013), 23–51, at 27 (translation from German mine): “Die Aussage des II. Vatikanischen Konzils gewinnt ihre Plausibilität gerade aus dieser veränderten Situation. Sie wird damit verantwortlich bejahbar. Es gilt nämlich: Auch Glaubensaussagen müssen in ihrer Glaubwürdigkeit begründet sein. Nur so gibt es seine *Ratio fidei*, einen verantwortlichen und damit vernünftigen Glauben.”

⁴⁷ See Mark S. Massa, “Beyond ‘Liberal’ and ‘Conservative’: The Internal Sectarian Threat to U.S. Catholicism,” in *Inculturation and the Church in North America*, ed. T. Frank Kennedy, SJ (New York: Herder & Herder/Crossroad, 2006), 127–43.

⁴⁸ Pierangelo Sequeri, *L’amore della ragione: Variazioni sinfoniche su un tema di Benedetto XVI* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 2012), 90.

creative process of interpretation that is not closed and finished.”⁴⁹ This process of interpretation may be only beginning. Now that Francis’ pontificate has brought about “a cease-fire” in the intra-Catholic debate over contentious theological issues related to the interpretation of the Second Vatican Council, it is time to rediscover *Gaudium et Spes* and its potential for a learning church and for Catholic higher education.

⁴⁹ Schelkshorn, “Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil als kirchlicher Diskurs über die Moderne,” 81.