In convoking the Council on Christmas Day 1961, Pope Saint John XXIII expressed his hope that the Council would address the needs of the modern world and bring the life-giving message of the Gospel into contact with the needs of the modern person:

The Church is now called upon to take the perennial, vital divine power of the Gospel and to inject it into the veins of the human society of today, which glories in its recent scientific and technological advances, at the same time that it is suffering damage to its social order, which some people have tried to repair without God’s assistance.1

The Pope offered the Church’s presence as a salutary, healing one which in turn provides a fitting response to the sickness menacing the well-being of the human condition. One might say that the Council was being convoked to build a field hospital. Already Pope John was signaling his desire that the Council address the human person in his or her concrete daily life, seeking practical advice to guide the person in the pursuit of God’s plan of salvation.

A month before officially opening the Council, Pope John presented his hopes for the upcoming event in a radio address on September 11, 1962.2 The Pope said: “Confronted with underdeveloped countries, the Church offers herself as she is and wants to be: the Church for all

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1 “Siquidem id ab Ecclesia nunc requiritur, ut virtutem perennem, vitalem, divinam Evangelii in venas iniciat eius, quae hodie est, humanae communitatis; quae gloriatur quidem de rebus a se recens in artium doctrinarumque provincias invectis, sed eius patitur socialis disciplinae damna, quam quidam, posthabitio Deo, restituere conati sunt.” Humanae Salutis, 6; The Pope Speaks, 354.

and particularly the Church of the poor.”3 Explicitly, the Pope addressed the themes of justice and peace, fixing the gaze of the arriving participants toward the plight of suffering humanity and the Church’s relation to the world in which such suffering was evident. The Pope’s address stressed the Church’s responsibilities in the world that encompass the entirety of earthly existence, of each person’s need for sustenance, for the equitable distribution of the fruits of the earth, for care of developing nations, for civil peace and social order.4

The Pope, in outlining what would be dealt with in the Pastoral Constitution, had given the first coherent synthesis of all those suggestions submitted by Council Fathers during the preparatory stages of the Council.5

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In these remarks, I would like to highlight a few historical features that enveloped those Council participants and that indicate a few salient themes that dominated the preparation of the Pastoral Constitution, one that inspired the creation of the very Pontifical Council responsible for convening us here in this Synod Hall. It would be folly to attempt to trace the history of the Pastoral Constitution itself or to re-present its content in any comprehensive way, let alone offer an evaluation of its impact over the past fifty years. Rather, we will recall some forgotten nuances within the historical context of Pastoral Constitution that might shed light on its value for our deliberations during this conference and into the future. Gaudium et Spes is not a museum piece so we should take care not to examine it as such.

POVERTY AND PEACE GROUPS AT THE COUNCIL

To a world divided North-South by inequality and East-West by ideology, many Council participants were steeped in the daily reality of poverty and hunger from many parts of the developing world. Their practical experience formed the bedrock for the Council’s reflection and

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3 “In faccia ai paesi sotto sviluppati la Chiesa si presenta quale è, e vuol essere, come la Chiesa di tutti, e particolarmente la Chiesa dei poveri,” ibid, 682.
4 “Giustizie e pace,” ibid, 682-3.
pronouncements on the Church’s responsibility to engage the world’s problems. This effort to convert the mandate identified by Pope John into Church teaching and practice benefited from the work of three distinct groups. The first such group, gathered under the title of the *Church of the Poor*, comprised bishops and experts from what was then called “the third world” and was focused on the charismatic auxiliary bishop of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Dom Hélder Câmara. Dom Hélder found an equal in terms of passion for the theme of poverty in the powerful council father, Cardinal Leon Suenens. This “poverty group” concerned itself with the goal of having the Council agenda address poverty in some concrete way. Its informal gatherings at Rome’s Belgian College became an attraction to *periti* seeking to introduce the world’s woes into the Council’s deliberations.

A second group came out of the growing peace movement that linked the Church’s social mission with the promotion of peace. The International Catholic Peace Movement or *Pax Christi* was founded in France in 1945 at the end of World War II. The intent of its founders was to forge bonds of peace and friendship between France and Germany after the horrors of the war. With two world wars in quick succession still fresh in most people’s minds, *Pax Christi* had become an international force by the 1960s, alive, perhaps, by the major conflicts in several parts of the world, notably in Vietnam, that indicated the larger context of a global Cold War. The threat of nuclear war that had been referenced before the Council in papal teaching hung over the Council’s opening session and would generate intense debate when the Pastoral Constitution came up for discussion in the Council’s two final sessions.

A third significant presence that acted at times as a hinge between the Church and the world was the emerging understanding of the apostolate of the laity. Focus on the role of the laity was well developed at the start of the Council. Pope Pius XII had lent support for two World Congresses on the Laity in 1951 and 1957. In 1952, following the first Congress, Pius XII set up the Permanent Committee for International Congresses of the Lay Apostolate (COPECIAL) that would provide expert advice as well as a reference point on the lay apostolate during the Council.

That there were so-called “interest groups” that convened concerned members and disseminated their views should come as no surprise. It was all part and parcel of a Church finding a new style of engagement, self-aware enough, perhaps, to be able to consider itself as an “expert in humanity.”

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While work on Schema XIII intensified during the Council’s Third and Fourth Sessions, two parallel developments in magisterial teaching provide evidence of certain assertiveness by key Council participants and their advisors. They involve a focus on the lay apostolate and ecumenical collaboration.

**LAITY**

Laity are incorporated into the Church as the Body of Christ according to their baptism. This baptismal consecration serves to ground their active participation in the Church and the world regardless of any special deputation by the hierarchy. It is Christ himself who deputes the laity for ministry. What is specific to the laity relates to the secular character of their mission. Laity seek the Kingdom of God principally in temporal affairs.

Being active in temporal affairs, seeking the justice of God’s kingdom and making known the will of the Father in daily life becomes a theological statement of the vocation of the laity as found in *Lumen gentium* 33.

The mission of the laity is nothing less than “evangelization and sanctification of people and by their efforts to make the spirit of the gospel permeate and perfect the temporal order.”

It is because of their secular character that the laity can make the Church present in temporal affairs, a faculty not particular to the clergy or religious. Activities such as work, raising a family, building a community, now take on a religious character as the laity are called not merely to represent the Church to the world, but to be the Church in the world – as salt of the earth. Of their very nature, carried on by lay missionaries, worldly activity itself partakes of the redemptive work of Christ himself. In a reflexive way, the laity bring the world into the heart of the Church.

Critically, the post conciliar committee established by the Pope to sort out the apostolate of the laity as it related to action on behalf of justice and peace recommended the Pope create structures that make clear the distinctiveness of the lay apostolate and the ministry of justice and peace outlined by the Pastoral Constitution. In short, two related aspects flowing from the PC can be summarized as such:

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Apostolicam actuositatem, 2.
On the one hand the Council on the Laity aims at better integration of the laity and of its apostolate in the life and mission of the Church, whilst on the other hand [the responsibility for the Church’s action on behalf of justice and peace in the world] is moreover a question of pledging the Church as a whole to the fulfillment of certain aspects of its mission.9

**ECUMENICAL COOPERATION**

From early on, draft documents were sent by to the World Council of Churches with the understanding that the issues being considered by the Mixed Commission were vital not only for the Roman Church but for all the churches.10 Rev. Dr. Lukas Vischer was the chief liaison at the WCC for the Council and would represent the WCC as an observer at the Council. In reviewing the early drafts of the schema, Vischer echoed the feeling of many of his colleagues at the WCC that cooperation on social justice could be seen as a privileged starting point for reciprocal dialogue between the Catholic Church and the WCC.11

Efforts at increased ecumenical collaboration had become well defined before the Council began. The Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity under Cardinal Bea pre-dated the start of the Council in light, perhaps, of John XXIII’s intuition in calling for an Ecumenical Council. Some have called it one of the first fruits of the Council, despite its establishment even before the Council bishops began to converge on Rome. Its role was twofold:

1. First are those efforts of communication that avoid any mischaracterization of the different positions of the churches themselves which can lead –
2. in a second movement – to a fruitful dialogue concerning respective understandings of Communion.

9 Ibid.
10 *History*, III, described how Vischer had seen the text of January 21.
This “dialogue” between Christians can prepare the way, accordingly, for “cooperation between them in the duties for the common good of humanity which are demanded by every Christian conscience.”

This point was made in a similar way in *Gaudium et spes* in the section on international affairs. Reminding Catholics about their duty and that of the whole people of God to do their utmost to alleviate poverty and the sufferings of the modern age, the Constitution says:

We do not forget that the unity of Christians is today awaited and desired by many, too, who do not believe in Christ; for the farther it advances toward truth and love under the powerful impulse of the Holy Spirit, the more this unity will be a harbinger of unity and peace for the world at large.

In *Gaudium et spes*, the Council reflects the high esteem with which the new ecumenical movement is regarded and the anticipation that such common efforts will produce an attractive witness of faith in the face of the world’s problems: “Wherever it seems convenient, this activity of Catholics should be carried on in unison with other Christian brothers.”

In the Council’s aftermath, the World Council of Churches in Geneva began parallel discussions with those charged with their Roman Catholic colleagues on creating similar structures as those called for by *Gaudium et spes*, notably on a so-called “poverty secretariat” as well as the structures on the apostolate of the laity. The post-war and pre-conciliar energy around ecumenical collaboration received a strong shot in the arm by the Council’s call for concerted effort to tackle the world’s problems. It became known as a form of “practical ecumenism” that was based not just on a common dialogue, but largely by a network of collaborators based on friendship and mutual respect.

**THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES AND THE METHOD OF PACEM IN TERRIS**

These two substantive areas relating to the laity and ecumenical cooperation can be added alongside two developments in style and method in the aggiornamento instigated by Pope Saint

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12 Ibid.
13 *Gaudium et spes*, 92.
14 *Gaudium et spes*, 88.
John. Early on, during the period when the Council’s work and agenda underwent significant reorganization, Pope Saint John issued his second major encyclical entitled *Pacem in terris* that dealt with the topic of peace: *Pacem in Terris*.\(^{15}\) Anything but theoretical, the encyclical confronted the current Cold War tensions that had recently manifested themselves in the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962.

*Pacem in terris* introduced the concept of reading the signs of the times as a hermeneutical key in forming the Church’s social teaching. With the threat of outright annihilation ever present, the document could not speak about the Church’s hope for the world without stating the pressing challenges of the time, most notably the real chance of nuclear war.

Methodologically, *Pacem in terris* was a novel approach to social teaching. By encouraging an initial evaluation of the signs of the times, the document employed an inductive approach displaying a new openness to the world as a source of information.

This methodology would inevitably turn to the world more and more in seeking material for the analysis prescribed in the encyclical itself. With a Council more open to the world, it is no surprise that it would not take long for the world and its problems to become the concern of the Council. More than this, *Pacem in terris* raised the expectation of those preparing for the Council’s discussion of the Church’s role in the modern world that specificity would be part of its outcome.

**Dialogue in Ecclesiam Suam**

What *Pacem in Terris* provided as a methodology, Pope Paul’s Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* offered as a *modus procedendi*, a way of proceeding. Issued in 1964 before the Council’s Third Session (and the appointment of 40 new women observers), the Encyclical offered a procedural itinerary as the Council hit the mid-way mark. Discernment of the signs of the times and the Church’s response should adopt a more “reflective” style according to the Pope’s methodology, one characterized by dialogue. As if urging a new and *practical* tone associated with dialogue between the Church and the world, one commentator underlined the importance of this shift

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towards dialogue with the world and its implications for the debate on the Church in the modern world:

The reflective approach to Christian doctrine is unique among ecclesiastical documents. Turning to God’s self-revelation and attentive to his voice in history we must examine more deeply what are the basic gifts of Christ to his Church, what defined doctrine really means in the life of the Church, what the divine action really produces in the Christian family, in short what the mystery of the Church is.\textsuperscript{16}

It was at this time that a decision was made to incorporate into the main body of the text, the \textit{practical recommendations} that up to that point were contained within the appendices of the draft schema of the Pastoral Constitution. In time, these recommendations or appendices would form the second part of \textit{Gaudium et spes}, “Some problems of special urgency.” Dialogue is linked with praxis, therefore. The fear that the Church’s doctrine would be watered down by too much emphasis on contingent historical events plagued discussion among council fathers since the beginning. In \textit{Ecclesiam Suam} Paul VI indicated a methodological shift that bore directly on the way the Church should address the contemporary situation.

\textbf{TRUE DEVELOPMENT}

Any concerns that were raised regarding the new method and style of Church teaching were complimented by a theological \textit{examination} of the goal of all human striving: authentic development. In this regard, assistance was provided by a young German \textit{peritus} named Josef Ratzinger who expounded on this vision of how the Church understands true human development.

In presenting its analysis of contemporary problems and scientific developments, the Council recognized that the world has a history to be unfolded by humankind, and that humankind will imprint upon this world a sense of direction and purpose. This anthropological dimension represents, for then-Father Josef Ratzinger, the Constitution’s “most characteristic option.”\textsuperscript{17} For

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\textsuperscript{17} Josef Ratzinger, “The Church and Man’s Calling,” in \textit{Vorgrimler} 118.
\end{flushright}
Father Ratzinger, the goal of the Council’s “discernment of spirits is said to lead to ‘fully human solutions.’” 18 The young Council peritus continues:

It would also have been in complete accord with making the central idea of the Pastoral Constitution that of humanitas and with its attempt to show that true humanitas is something that can only be achieved theologically. 19

This commentary is important for the entire notion of development which, accordingly, must be seen theologically from the very analysis of humanity’s origin and end. For Father Ratzinger, the concept of the imago Dei which is ambiguously present in the Old Testament finds its definition when transferred to Christ in the New Testament. In this context, an idea that originated in a theology of creation takes on an “eschatological theme, concerned less with the origin than with the future of man.” 20

The person’s ultimate goal – ad finem suum ultimum 21 - is unity with God and the removal of sin. Christ as the new Adam reveals one aspect of man’s spiritual dimension. The form for this transformation towards one’s ultimate goal, therefore, is Christological. Through the Incarnation, therefore, the Word who is Christ becomes the new and “final Adam.” 22 Apart from God, existence is empty of meaning and “suffering overwhelms us.” 23 The search for God, on the other hand, is action in the world mindful of a desire for unity with God and under his divine influence – the influxus gratiae.

Misguided direction will distort God’s plan of salvation carried out in time. The motor of salvation history is the person’s “total vocation” to follow where the Spirit of the Lord leads. 24 Humanity is guided by faith along this path “and directs the mind to solutions which are fully

18 Ibid.
19 Ibid, 121.
20 Ibid.
21 Gaudium et spes, 13.
22 Ibid, 22.
23 “Extra Eius Evangelium nos obruit.” Ibid.
24 Gaudium et spes, 11.
human.”25 For the Pastoral Constitution, there is no description of the human without spiritual perspective and that Christ and the Spirit show us how this fully spiritual person/community realizes its inbuilt finality in the course of history.

The Constitution welcomes the new experiences that have prompted scientific advances and a new perspective on creation and man’s origin. Open to misinterpretation, the Council sought to clarify what is salvific in these new experiences so that modern life would not go astray.

**CONCLUSION**

We are able to say, in a sweeping conclusion, that in seeking to respond to the challenges of the modern world, the Church was obliged to reflect upon its nature and mission in two ways.

First, it sought from within its own teaching, reasons both for the Church’s engagement with the world and the proper mode for such engagement by all the People of God, each according to his or her state.

Second, the Council drew upon the history of social teaching and formulated positive recommendations designed to respond to a series of prevailing social problems summarized under the category of “justice and peace.” In this way, the new understanding of the Church’s engagement with the world was closely identified with the Church’s response to the problems of poverty and social conflict. This was done in light of a theological understanding of what we mean by true development. We can say that the concept of *caritas* underwent a thorough updating during the Council’s debate and emerged stronger having incorporated into it the modern concepts of social justice, solidarity and integral human development. In short, the Church found reasons from within her own teaching to translate the consequences of the faith to certain urgent problems.

The Council was haunted by two world wars in quick succession, the plight of refugees and casualties after the war as well as other instances of social injustice. Traveling to India, Pope Paul witnessed for himself the shocking north-south divide. In addressing the United Nations, the Pope decried the looming threat of nuclear war. For the Pastoral Constitution, the presence of the Church in the world of the 1960s had an obvious calling. Similar crises exist today, ones that this

25 Ibid.
Conference will treat in a spirit similar to that of the Council participants and their successors. The plea of a forgotten hero of the Council, Barbara Ward, is as urgent today as it was then: “If Christians do not provide the needed stiffening of hope, faith, fortitude and love, then who will?”

Thank You.

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