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Sæcula Sæculorum: Missionary Ecclesiology and the Church-World Relationship

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Abstract: This article examines the relationship between church and world in order to provide a theological basis for a missionary ecclesiology. From Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*, I establish that the church's existence is interior to the world, interior to the human project, and engaged in human history. The church world relationship is one of ontological dependence and reciprocal influence. Latin American voices, especially Ignacio Ellacuría, Jon Sobrino, and the CELAM conferences, provide this consideration with a greater attention to the concrete historical conditions in which real women and men live. A recognition that mission arises from the demands of the church's catholicity, and an engagement with Ellacuría's and Sobrino's notion of the crucified peoples as a site of encounter with Christ, reconfigures the missionary relationship. The church is not simply the world's benefactor, but is itself the beneficiary of the world.

Keywords: Church and World, *Gaudium et spes*, CELAM Conferences, Jon Sobrino, Ignacio Ellacuría, Hans Urs von Balthasar

Introduction

The Second Vatican Council has come full circle with Pope Francis I.¹ Vatican II highlighted the importance of the local church and episcopal conferences,² with particular fruit being born by the *Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano* (CELAM).³ Even as early as Paul VI's papacy, the perspective of the Latin American

1 I have no intention, in this context, of entering into ideological wrangling over Pope Francis, nor to intervene into the debates about a hermeneutics of continuity or of rupture vis-à-vis Vatican II. Such disputes, while convenient ideological litmus tests, are far better indicators of theologians' outlooks than they are of the Council's or the Pope's actual teaching.

2 *Sacrosanctum concilium*, no. 22; *Lumen gentium*, nos. 23, 26–27. See also Faggioli, *True Reform*, 73, 80, 90, 130.

3 See especially CELAM, *Medellín*; "The Final Document" [Puebla]; "Aparecida: Concluding Document." On the CELAM conferences more broadly see Abalos, "The Medellín [sic] Conference," 113–32; Beozzo, "Medellín Forty Years On," 121–32; Gremillion, "Significance of Puebla," 310–29; McDonnell, "Koinonia/Communio as an Integral Ecclesiology," 399–427; McGrath, "The Impact of *Gaudium et Spes*," 61–73; Hégy, "A Critical Note on Aparecida," 539–51; Gutiérrez, "The Preferential Option for the Poor at Aparecida," 71–92; Sobrino, "The Significance of Puebla," 289–309; Valiente, "Reception of Vatican II in Latin America," 795–823; Verstraeten, "Challenges for Catholic Social Teaching," 314–330; Murphy, "Reflections on Puebla," 650–54; Suess, "Die missionarische Synthese nach Aparecida," 68–83; Hollenbach, "Commentary on *Gaudium et Spes*," 287.

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bishops has been appropriated by “the Vatican.”⁴ With Francis, however, this reception of Latin American theology has reached a highpoint. His apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii gaudium*, which he describes as “programmatic” for his pontificate, quotes extensively from the Aparecida document, of which he was a principal drafter, and from which he appropriates the central category of missionary discipleship.⁵ Hence, CELAM’s taking up of the Council’s invitation to pursue a local theological agenda grounded in their own concrete pastoral exigencies is itself an implementation of Vatican II’s teaching, while the reception of the Latin American perspective by the church universal represents a fuller appropriation of the Council’s vision.

In addition to this dynamic of appropriating local perspectives, Francis’s particular theological agenda, particularly his call for a missionary conversion of the church, is an opportunity for a fuller implementation of the Second Vatican Council.⁶ When the council fathers declared that “the pilgrim church is of its nature missionary,”⁷ they distilled the fundamentally missionary orientation that had been evident in the Council since the beginning. The first document issued by Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, evinces a solicitude for the church’s mission to the world,⁸ while the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*’s, discussion of the church is set within the context first of the missions of Christ and the Holy Spirit, and then the apostles’ continuation of that mission.⁹ This missionary spirit also pervades the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*, which ventures to address itself not solely to the Catholic faithful, but to all the world.¹⁰ *Gaudium et spes* thus considers the church in its life directed outward, culminating Cardinal Suenens’s call to consider the church in its life *ad intra* (resulting in *Lumen gentium*), and its life *ad extra* (resulting in the pastoral constitution).¹¹ Thus, *Gaudium et spes*’s consideration of the church’s engagement with the world represents a culmination of the Council’s missionary outlook, while Francis’s call for a missionary conversion of the church calls our attention back to this Conciliar *Leitmotif*.

This article contributes to this call to recover Vatican II’s missionary outlook by retrieving and extending its account of the church’s relationship to the world. In considering the church’s life *ad extra*, its life as directed toward the world, an articulation of the church-world relationship is clearly in order, for indeed, this is precisely what is under consideration. Understanding the conciliar vision of the church-world relationship provides necessary context for heeding Francis’s call for a missionary conversion of the church.¹² An examination of the pastoral constitution, supplemented by voices from Latin America and the Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, yields an account of the church and the world existing

4 E.g., Paul VI, *Populorum progressio; Evangelii nuntiandi*, nos. 29–39. See further Charbonneau, “De *Rerum novarum* à *Populorum progressio*,” 755–806; Deck, “Commentary on *Populorum Progressio*,” 292–314. Of course, to an extent, the very idea that this local expression of Catholicism needs to be validated by a central authority runs counter to the Conciliar outlook, which stressed that individual bishops “are not to be considered vicars of the Roman pontiffs, because they exercise a power that is proper to themselves” (*Lumen gentium*, no. 27). Hence the scare quotes around “the Vatican.” At the same time, the Roman See continues to have a unique prerogative in governing the universal church (e.g., *Lumen gentium*, nos. 23–25). Hence, papal appropriation of the deliberations of episcopal conferences should not be seen as a validation of their perspective, but rather as a reception of that perspective by and for the church as a whole.

5 Francis I, *Evangelii gaudium*. The exhortation is identified as programmatic in no. 25. The Aparecida document is quoted in nos. 10, 15, 25, 83, 122, 124, 181. The notion of missionary discipleship pervades the Aparecida document, and is developed in nos. 119–121 of *Evangelii gaudium*.

6 See *Ibid.*, nos. 19–49 for the call to a missionary conversion.

7 *Ad gentes*, no. 2.

8 *Sacrosanctum concilium*, nos. 2, 9.

9 *Lumen gentium*, nos. 1–5, 18–20, 31.

10 *Gaudium et spes*, no. 2.

11 On this see Moeller, “History of the Constitution,” 10–12; Tucci, “Introduction historique,” 33–35; McGrath, “Présentation de la constitution,” 26–27; Wiltgen, *The Rhine Flows into the Tiber*, 206; Gaillardetz and Clifford, *Keys to the Council*, 90.

12 Hence, in this article, I do not deal extensively with Pope Francis himself. His papacy provides the occasion for revisiting *Gaudium et spes* and subsequent developments, which are the focus here. Engagement with Pope Francis himself in light of this investigation would require another article. See also Schlesinger, *Missa Est!* for an attempt to engage with Pope Francis’s invitation for a missionary conversion of the church.

in a dynamic and reciprocal relationship.¹³ As we shall see throughout, the church is interior to the world, and requires engagement with the world in order to be truly itself. The church does not simply give to the world, but also receives. Hence, the church's stance toward the world is best characterized as a critical permeability.

The Church's Existence is Interior to the World

Perhaps the most fundamental component of the relationship between church and world—so fundamental that it is easy to overlook—is that the church exists as a part of the world. There is no other place wherein it could be located or act. It is significant to note that Joseph Ratzinger, who is famous for his criticism of *Gaudium et spes* as too optimistic, also raised the criticism that the pastoral constitution failed to adequately account for the fact that the church is interior to the world, which shortcoming he attributes to “the deeply-rooted extrinsicism of ecclesiastical thought, to long acquaintance with the Church's exclusion from the general course of development and to retreat into a special little ecclesiastical world from which an attempt is made to speak to the rest of the world.”¹⁴

So when the church engages with the world, it does so from within the world. This means that any sort of contrastive or adversarial relationship posited for the church-world relationship must be attenuated by this basic ontological fact. If the church is in contrast with the world, it is equally in solidarity with the world, because it is not non-world.¹⁵

Gaudium et spes and Beyond

Of course, “world” is an ambiguous and polyvalent concept. *Gaudium et spes* offers a sufficiently inclusive definition of the “world” for our purposes, which is the one with which I shall be working:

This world it [the Council] sees as the world of men and women, the whole human family in its total environment; the stage of human history notable for its toil, its tragedies and its triumphs; the world which Christians believe has been established and kept in being by its creator's love, has fallen into the bondage of sin but has been liberated by Christ, who was crucified and has risen to shatter the power of the evil one, so that it could be transformed according to God's purpose and come to fulfilment [sic].¹⁶

The world, then, is understood in anthropological terms.¹⁷ It is the environment and sphere of activity wherein human beings live and work, within which history unfolds. It is, further, understood theologically as the creature of God, which has been corrupted by, but then liberated from sin.

The conciliar debate regarding the conception of the world was famously fractious. German theologians such as Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger considered the constitution too optimistic, lacking adequate

¹³ Balthasar himself was quite critical of liberation theology. See, e.g., “Liberation Theology and Salvation History.” It is beyond the scope of this article to reconcile these perspectives. Nevertheless, see Schlesinger, “Eucharistic Poverty,” and *Missa Est!* for a more thorough attempt at putting Balthasar and liberation theology into mutually corrective dialogue.

¹⁴ Ratzinger, “Dignity of Human Person,” 119. For further affirmations of the church as part of the world within the context of *Gaudium et spes*, see Benestad, “Doctrinal Perspectives,” 147; Lambert, “Problématique générale,” 153, 161–162, 165; Dupront, “L'Église et le monde,” 171–172.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Hunsberger, “Contrast and Companionship,” 7–16; Grootaers, “Rupture et présence,” 51–57; Eichinger, “Solidarität als soteriologische Kategorie,” 311–26; Sobrino, “Communion, Conflict, and Ecclesial Solidarity,” 615–36.

¹⁶ *Gaudium et spes*, no. 2. On the ambiguity of the concept “world,” and the long road to a definition within the constitution see Routhier, “Finishing the Work Begun,” 122–177; Hünemann, “Final Weeks of the Council,” 288–296; Nirappel, “Definition of the Term ‘World,’” 89–126.

¹⁷ On anthropology as a basic category for *Gaudium et spes* see Congar, “Église et monde,” 31; Lambert, “Problématique générale,” 135–137; Joblin, “L'Église dans le monde,” 587–590; Moeller, “Preface and Introductory Statement,” 91–92. Note, though that the anthropocentrism of *Gaudium et spes* is reinterpreted in light of the incarnation, such that it is also a Christocentrism. So Ratzinger, “Dignity of Human Person,” 159–163; Schindler, “Interpreting *Gaudium et Spes*,” 156–84; Hummes, “Foundations of *Gaudium et Spes*,” 233–236.

consideration of sin's effects, and prone to eliding the natural and supernatural orders.¹⁸ On the other hand, certain French *periti*, particularly Yves Congar and Marie-Dominique Chenu, welcomed the schema's intent, while also acknowledging its shortcomings.¹⁹ Eventually, the Germans accepted *Schema 13* as a basis for revision. The mixed commission responsible for the revisions had a number of German representatives, with the result that numerous changes were made and, as Charles Moeller notes:

the version put to the vote by the fathers before its promulgation represented the consensus of the two main tendencies which had stood confronted since the beginning of work on Schema 13: one a concrete outlook marked by a certain fundamental optimism, the other a dialectical, paradoxical attitude insisting on the polyvalency of the world in which the Church lives.²⁰

Therefore, in evaluating the relative optimism of the constitution, we must keep in mind the fact that the final text's express purpose is to address the German concerns about this optimism by taking into account the ambiguities consequent to the world's fallenness.

So, while *Gaudium et spes* evinces a genuine optimism regarding the world—an optimism that continued to elicit reservations by figures such as Ratzinger—this optimism is a tempered optimism, recognizing the ambiguity of the world's moral status. It is God's good creature, but at the same time distorted by sin. Further, although sin distorts the creation, God has not abandoned the world to misery. The world is also redeemed by Christ, whose grace, in the Holy Spirit, is operative in the world. The redemption is not fully realized, but it is at work. Hence, in dealing with the world, its original goodness, its fallen sinfulness, and the operation of divine grace must all be taken into account. Neither a facile acquiescence to the status quo nor an impetuous rejection of worldly realities is adequate to the church's call to scrutinize the signs of the times and interpret them in the gospel's light.²¹

As the first paragraph of the constitution noted, the church in its pilgrimage is interior to this world and to the human project such that “there is nothing truly human which does not also affect” it.²² The church is firmly rooted in history. Indeed, its founding events occurred in history. However, the church has an eschatological orientation, destiny, and mandate, such that its proper “function...can be fully discharged only in the age to come.”²³ So, while the church is interior to the world of human history, it retains an eschatological and transcendent reserve, and cannot be exhaustively identified with any particular project of world-building.²⁴ At the same time, though, this eschatological reserve does not excuse the church's members from engaging in temporal responsibilities and world building, but rather infuses them with transcendent and eschatological depth.²⁵

Ignacio Ellacuría offers a helpful perspective on this point, noting that the type of historical transcendence that Christianity envisions is not a transcendence away from history, but rather a transcendence within

¹⁸ See Moeller, “History of the Constitution,” 59; Tanner, “Church in the World,” 270–331. Routhier, “Finishing the Work Begun,” 126–136; Murphy, “Globalization from Benedict XV to Benedict XVI,” 295–424.

¹⁹ Moeller, “History of the Constitution,” 59; Routhier, “Finishing the Work Begun,” 126–139.

²⁰ Moeller, “History of the Constitution,” 60. See further, Hünermann, “Final Weeks of the Council,” 387–388.

²¹ Hünermann believes that the constitution has achieved this goal, describing its achievement as clearly articulating “the reciprocal interconnection of the Church and the world—without any leveling down and conformity.” “Final Weeks of the Council,” 424. As noted above, Moeller shares this basic assessment. “History of the Constitution,” 60. So also Hollenbach, “Commentary on *Gaudium et Spes*,” 275.

²² *Gaudium et spes*, no. 1.

²³ Ibid., no. 40. See Lambert, “Problématique générale,” 164–167; Hummes, “Foundations of *Gaudium et Spes*,” 237–238.

²⁴ *Gaudium et spes*, no. 42. On this see Smulders, “L'activité humaine,” 415–418; Auer, “Man's Activity,” 198; Kaelin, “Les fondements théologiques,” 15; Morandé, “Relevance of *Gaudium et Spes*,” 150.

²⁵ *Gaudium et spes*, nos. 38–39, 43. On the integral relationship between world-building and the eschaton see Hollenbach, “Commentary on *Gaudium et Spes*,” 276; Thils, “L'activité humaine,” 299–303; Lambert, “Problématique générale,” 157; Auer, “Man's Activity,” 197–198. Note, though, Auer's observation that the constitution “did not entirely succeed in integrating earthly activity into the vocation to saving communion with Christ” (200). See also Congar, “Role of the Church,” 206–207, 211; Hummes, “Foundations of *Gaudium et Spes*,” 237–238. For the perspective that the eschaton does not absolve from activity, but all the more strictly obliges it see Benestad, “Doctrinal Perspectives,” 161; Smulders, “L'activité humaine,” 400–415; Grootaers, “Rupture et présence,” 58–65.

history.²⁶ The Christ event, which stands at the center of history,²⁷ and which effects every human being,²⁸ has infused temporal realities with transcendent eschatological depths.²⁹ Rather than there being a two tracked sacred and profane history, or a history of the world and a history of salvation, the entire world is united in God's one saving history.³⁰ The history of salvation expresses itself by way of salvation in history, which, while firmly rooted in concrete history, is suffused with the eschatological.³¹ The reign of God extends beyond the boundaries of the church. It is intended for the whole world, and not solely for the church. The church and the world are united in one history—indeed, this one history is how *Gaudium et spes* defines the world—and share a common eschatological destiny.³²

Within the world, of which it is itself a part, the church functions as a leaven, effecting transformation and bringing elevation.³³ In addition to its obvious biblical pedigree (Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:18–21),³⁴ this is a powerfully missionary image. For leaven only functions when it has material on which to work. In order to properly be itself, the church needs the material provided to it by the world, specifically humanity, otherwise it has nothing to do.³⁵ The leavening transformation effected by the church, then, spreads the transcendent eschatological depth brought about by the Christ event into the temporal realities in which the church's members are engaged.³⁶ The goal of the human project is a just society in which the entire human family is united,³⁷ and the church is called to realize the unity of the human race together with God.³⁸

26 Ellacuría, "Historicity of Christian Salvation," 256–274; *Freedom Made Flesh*, 11–18; "Crucified People," 581. See also Burke, "Ellacuría's Soteriology," 169–86; *Theology of Ellacuría*, 152–170; Palazzi, "Hope and the Kingdom of God," 132–133.

27 *Gaudium et spes*, no. 38. On this see Thils, "L'activité humaine," 297; Lambert, "Problématique générale," 167; Auer, "Man's Activity," 197; Ratzinger, "Dignity of Human Person," 159; Hummes, "Foundations of *Gaudium et Spes*," 233.

28 *Gaudium et spes*, no. 22. See also Hollenbach, "Commentary on *Gaudium et Spes*," 277; Auer, "Man's Activity," 197; Ratzinger, "Dignity of Human Person," 160–163; Hummes, "Foundations of *Gaudium et Spes*," 236; Tillard, "L'Église et les valeurs terrestres," 277–289.

29 *Gaudium et spes*, nos. 39, 10. See Smulders, "L'activité humaine," 411–418; Thils, "L'activité humaine," 302–303; Lambert, "Problématique générale," 164–167; Auer, "Man's Activity," 198; Chenu, "Signes des temps," 220–221. Chenu's argument is particularly interesting, as he notes that, biblically, the "signs of the times" referred to signs of the impending eschatological crisis. The Council's use of the category "signs of the times" is appropriate because Christ has inaugurated the eschatological fulfillment.

30 Ellacuría, "Historicity of Christian Salvation," 252–289; "Church of the Poor," 552. On the unity of history in Ellacuría's thought see Burke, *Theology of Ellacuría*, 152–157. See also Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 39–46, 106–120. On the unity of history more generally, see Lambert, "Problématique générale," 161–165; Tillard, "L'Église et les valeurs terrestres," 275–279.

31 On salvation history and salvation in history see Ellacuría, *Freedom Made Flesh*, 12–14, 81–82; "Church of the Poor," 544–554; Burke, "Ellacuría's Soteriology," 177–180. For the eschatological depth of history more generally, see above.

32 Lambert, "Problématique générale," 160–162; Kaelin, "Fondements théologiques," 11; Hummes, "Foundations of *Gaudium et Spes*," 237–238; Tillard, "L'Église et les valeurs terrestres," 309–315; Fuellenbach, *Community for the Kingdom*, 74–75; Henn, "Church and the Kingdom of God," 127–138.

33 *Gaudium et spes*, no. 40. On this see Gaillardetz and Clifford, *Keys to the Council*, 92–94; Ellacuría, "Church of the Poor," 553–554; Comblin, *People of God*, 142–163. The imagery of leaven is also used in *Lumen gentium*, no. 31, and *Ad gentes*, no. 15. In both of these cases, it refers specifically to the calling of the laity. Significantly, *Gaudium et spes* does not limit this leavening function to the laity, but refers it to the church qua church. On the ambiguity of the so called secular character of the laity see Fox, "Laity, Ministry, and Secular Character," 121–51; Hagstrom, "Theology of Ecclesial Lay Ministry," 152–74; Jean Beyer, "Le laïc et les laïcs dans l'Église," 157–85. Aurelie and Hagstrom both conclude that the church itself has a secular mission, while Beyer notes that in almost all cases the aspects of the lives of the laity that are deemed "secular" are also shared by clergy and religious (the exception being marriage), making the concept of "secular character" not particularly useful.

34 Interestingly, in Jesus's parables, the leaven refers to the Kingdom of heaven, rather than to the church as such.

35 Congar, "Church in the Modern World," 206–207; "Église et monde," 31.

36 *Gaudium et spes*, nos. 40, 43.

37 Ibid., nos. 23–32. See also Congar, "Church in the Modern World," 206–207; "Église et monde," 31; Hollenbach, "Commentary on *Gaudium et Spes*," 275; Kaelin, "Fondements théologiques," 15 (though Kaelin sees more discontinuity here than I do); Lambert, "Problématique générale," 157; Smulders, "L'activité humaine," 411–413.

38 *Lumen gentium*, nos. 1, 9; *Ad gentes*, nos. 2–5; *Gaudium et spes*, nos. 38–39, 45.

It seems, then, that the church's mission is directed toward a supernatural end that at once encompasses, perfects, and surpasses humanity's natural end.³⁹

CELAM Conferences and Concrete History

It is precisely because grace does not abolish, but rather perfects and elevates nature that Christian engagement in the world takes the form of concrete historical praxis. If the construction of a just society is the natural end toward which humanity is oriented, then the supernatural end toward which the gospel directs us cannot be less than the construction of such a society, though it also exceeds those proportions. In order to clarify this, I now turn to consider a particular development of the conciliar teaching on the church and the world. *Gaudium et spes* explained that the church's task is to "scrutinize [*perscrutandi*] the signs of the times and interpret them in light of the gospel."⁴⁰ As this call has been heeded throughout the church, awareness has grown that economic realities are among the most significant signs of the times.⁴¹

The CELAM meetings at Medellín (1968), Puebla (1979), and Aparecida (2007) develop the insights of *Gaudium et spes* with respect to the signs of the times within the context of Latin American life, particularly the economic realities of that life. In the face of the dire poverty of Latin America, the documents call for a preferential option for the poor expressed in a commitment to integral liberation.⁴² As the Aparecida document, having developed a comprehensive account of life in Latin America with special attention to economic, social, familial, and ethnic realities⁴³ puts it, "The Church's rich social magisterium tells us that we cannot conceive of an offer of life in Christ without dynamism toward integral liberation, humanization, reconciliation, and involvement in society."⁴⁴

I raise the Latin American perspective here largely because it demonstrates the concrete historicity of Christian missionary activity. While the reality of global poverty is a pervasive issue, it is not the sole issue facing the church in its task. However, the Latin American response to the sign of the times that is poverty ought to be illustrative of how, *mutatis mutandis*, other realities might be approached.⁴⁵

The CELAM documents throw into bold relief the fact that the world is a deeply ambiguous reality. The church has a mission in that world, and this mission has an eschatological purpose—the intimate union of

³⁹ So also Witte, who notes that the unity of which the church is the sacrament is not to be confused with the natural unity of the human race, even as it "presupposes" it. "L'Église, «sacramentum unitatis»,» 466, 487–488; Grillmeier, who notes that "those who are members of the Church of Christ are enabled to enter into the most intimate union with God and into a deeper fellowship with men [sic], one not founded merely on the usual basis of human relationships but also on the unifying force of the self-communication of God in Christ and the Spirit." "Mystery of the Church," 140. By "natural end" I mean no more than what is proportionate to the human nature even apart from supernatural elevation, and what may be explicitly discerned apart from special revelation. I am not making any statement, one way or the other, about the precise relationship between the orders of nature and grace, nor of the propriety of a hypothetical state of pure nature.

⁴⁰ *Gaudium et spes*, no. 4 (My translation). On the "signs of the times," see Chenu, "Signes des temps," 205–229; François Houtart, "Aspects sociologiques des «signes du temps»,» 171–204; Verstraeten, "Interpreting Signs of the Times," 314–30.

⁴¹ One obvious development in this direction is Paul VI's Encyclical, *Populorum progressio*, nos. 6, 13, 20–21, 45–46, 76. See further Charbonneau, "De *Rerum novarum* à *Populorum progressio*," 755–806; Deck, "Commentary on *Populorum Progressio*," 292–314.

⁴² CELAM, *Medellín*, 14.2–7; *Puebla*, no. 1134; For the development of the preferential option for the poor outside of the episcopal conferences see, e.g., Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*; Jon Sobrino, *True Church and the Poor*; *No Salvation Outside the Poor*; Comblin, *People of God*, 38–51, 118–141.

⁴³ CELAM, *Aparecida*, nos. 33–100.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 359. So also Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 83–105; Sobrino, *Church and Poor*, 40–63; *Principle of Mercy*, 9, 15–22; *Christ the Liberator*, 43–49; *No Salvation Outside the Poor*, 41–74; Ellacuría, *Freedom Made Flesh*, 87–124; "The Crucified People," 592–603; "Church of the Poor," 544–545, 554.

⁴⁵ In a parallel manner some have suggested that, as the signs of the times have shifted since *Gaudium et spes*, making some of its specific statements now out of date, the constitution's ongoing relevance might come from the general comportment towards the world that it shows. So Riccardi, "Historical Perspective and *Gaudium et Spes*," 254; Tanner, *Church and the World*, 65–90. Weigel recognizes that the constitution is dated, and that there was much that it did not anticipate, but suggests that Pope John Paul II's development of *Gaudium et spes*'s anthropology is the best hermeneutical way forward, "Rescuing *Gaudium et Spes*," 253–265.

God and humanity.⁴⁶ This eschatological resolution involves the complete wellbeing of human beings, in all aspects of their being and all dimensions of their existence. The reality of sin in its personal, social, and structural forms leads to human misery and injustice, all of which lead away from the human flourishing which is the church's eschatological goal. Short of the eschaton, mission involves addressing these realities that fall short of the full flourishing of the human race. The church, on its way to the eschaton, does not by-pass human wellbeing.

World-Engagement as Necessity for the Church

I have already established that the church is not non-world, that it is interior to and part of the world. Already, this points to engagement with the world as a necessity for the church. Now, however, I shall push this somewhat tautologous affirmation further with more specifically theological undergirding for the exigency of engagement with the world for the church.

Fulfilling the Church's Catholicity

According to *Ad gentes* no. 1, the church's mission is motivated by obedience to Christ and by its own catholicity's internal demands.⁴⁷ That the church is catholic means that it must take root and grow up within every segment and sub-segment of the human family. No portion or dimension of humanity may be excluded. Rather, the church must express itself among all the peoples of the earth. Note, then, that the logic driving this affirmation is not that the church must spread itself to the peoples of the earth for their own benefit (though, of course, that is not untrue). Rather, the church must find expression in all the peoples of the earth in order to be true to itself.⁴⁸ The former arrangement can be used to undergird paternalistic colonialisms that seek to obliterate local cultures with a "Christian" (read "European or North American") culture.⁴⁹ However, on the conception I am advancing, paternalism is ruled out, for the church is equally in need. In order for its catholicity to be expressed, the church must receive from the local culture, and the gospel must take root in and elevate that culture in such a way as to allow the church to remain true to itself.⁵⁰

Those who are baptized into the church do not cease to belong to their own local cultures. As *Gaudium et spes* puts it, they are members of both the heavenly and earthly cities, both of which remain intertwined before the eschaton.⁵¹ Georg Vicedom speaks of a "double belonging" that makes the church unique among religions: one belongs both to the church and its Lord and to one's own "*Volk*."⁵² Indeed, this is one of the reasons that *Gaudium et spes* only sparingly used the ecclesiological image "People of God," which figured so prominently in *Lumen gentium*: in order to avoid giving the impression that the Christian church was one people among others, rather than itself being interior to all the peoples of the earth.⁵³ Becoming a member of the church does not remove one from the world, for the church is within the world. Rather, it reconfigures one's relationship with temporal realities, referring them to their eschatological fulfillment.

⁴⁶ *Gaudium et spes*, nos. 40, 45.

⁴⁷ *Ad gentes*, no. 1.

⁴⁸ As Martelet puts it, the church's mission fills out its own catholicity and "spiritually recapitulates" the world. "L'Église et le temporel," 535–539 [535] (My translation).

⁴⁹ Note this criticism in Flett, "Communion as Propaganda," 457–76. Haapiainen, "Missio Dei in Vicedom's Theology," 45–49; Hollenweger, "Pluriformität der Kirche," 672–673; Mark Laing, "Missio Dei Some Implications," 93–94. Collett provides a survey of such critiques in *Das Missionsverständnis der Kirche*, 26–41.

⁵⁰ On inculturation more broadly see Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*; Oborji, *Concepts of Mission*, 98–117; Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*, 385–394; Sanneh, *Translating the Message*; Müller, *Missionarische Anpassung als theologisches Prinzip*.

⁵¹ *Gaudium et spes*, no. 40.

⁵² Vicedom, *Missio Dei*, 91 (My translation. I have left *Volk* untranslated because any rendering in English loses a good deal of depth and resonance that is present in the German).

⁵³ Congar, "Church in the Modern World," 222. Cf. Ratzinger, "Dignity of Human Person," 118–119.

Hans Urs von Balthasar pushes this insight further, arguing that the church must recognize that its catholic unity is not its own, but lies solely “in Christ, not in itself, so that it only proclaims its unity from Christ, and only in fulfilling this mission does it even realize its unity...building up and expanding its catholicity by missionary work.”⁵⁴ The church exists not for itself but for the world to which it has been sent. “The church according to its inner constitution—and not only accidentally—transcends beyond itself into the entire human world.”⁵⁵ The church, according to Balthasar is utopian, in the sense of being *eutopos* (not a place), rather than merely *eutopos* (a good place).

In the world...there is for his [Christ's] church no space [*Raum*], it can only exist in the place-lessness [*Ortlosigkeit*] of the desert, where a “place” [*Ort (topos)*] is prepared for it...For the world the woman [i.e., the church, see Rev 12:13–17] remains utopian and formless in the worldly sense; the “place” [*Ort*] prepared for her by God cannot be found upon the earth.⁵⁶

The Church, then, is radically de-centered, lacking its own form, lacking its own place. The Church exists within the movement of Christ to the world.

Encountering Christ in the Neighbor

As *Gaudium et spes* affirms, the Holy Spirit fills the whole earth, and God is at work throughout his creation. The church is led by the Spirit to recognize the work of God beyond its boundaries.⁵⁷ This, of course, involves the church in the world. And, once more, this is not a matter of the church being involved in the world because the world is somehow dependent upon the church, but because the church itself needs this engagement.

Within the Latin American context, this has gained greater and more concrete specificity. The Aparecida document roots its account of missionary discipleship in a theology of encounter with Christ. The life of the missionary disciple is the result of such an encounter (nos. 11, 13, 32, 131, 243). Christ is encountered in Scripture, the liturgy, the lives of the saints, especially Mary, and in one's neighbor, especially the poor (nos. 247, 250, 257, 266, 273). Through genuine encounter with the living Christ, one is enabled to read the signs of the times differently, and to joyfully engage the world with missionary love (nos. 19, 23, 38–29).

As the bishops relate,

In the face of Jesus Christ, dead and risen, bruised for our sins and glorified by the Father, in this suffering and glorious face, we can see with the eyes of faith the humiliated face of so many men and women of our peoples, and at the same time, their calling to the freedom of the children of God, to the full realization of their personal dignity and to brotherhood [*sic*] among all.⁵⁸

So, then, the life of missionary discipleship overflows from an encounter with the living Christ. Moreover, by virtue of the incarnation, by which Christ has “united himself in some sense with every human being,”⁵⁹ the neighbor, and especially the poor neighbor, has become a site of encounter with Christ. As the church

⁵⁴ Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, 2/2:388 (My translation). In a similar vein, Congar writes, “It is therefore called—and this is a source of its essential missionary character—too meet what is in Christ for mankind [*sic*] and for the world, and what is in mankind [*sic*] and in the world for Christ....This structure of the divine action is the reason for the Church's having to receive from the world, and lends the accomplishment of its mission a certain dialogic character of which missionaries today are very conscious.” “Church in the Modern World,” 220–221.

⁵⁵ Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, 2/2:400 (My translation). So also *Mysterium Paschale*, 263.

⁵⁶ Balthasar, *Theodramatik*, 3:437 (My translation. The bracketed German is my own, while the glossed Greek is original). On the formlessness of the church for Balthasar, which enables the church to transparently mediate Christ, see Chapp, “Who Is the Church?,” 322–38; Healy and Schindler, “Balthasar on the Church as Eucharist,” 59; Koerpel, “The Form and Drama of the Church,” 79–80.

⁵⁷ *Gaudium et spes*, no 11. On this see Chenu, “Signes des temps,” 212–215; Congar, “Church in the Modern World,” 212; Hollenbach, “Commentary on *Gaudium et Spes*,” 277; Lambert, “Problématique générale,” 159–165; McEvoy, “Significance of *Gaudium et Spes*,” 53–54.

⁵⁸ CELAM, *Aparecida*, no. 32.

⁵⁹ *Gaudium et spes*, no. 22.

is carried beyond itself by its encounter with Christ, it finds, in the world into which it is carried, a further encounter with the same Christ, and by that encounter is carried once more into its mission.

Closely related to this theology of encounter is the notion of the “crucified peoples,” first elaborated by Ignacio Ellacuría, but then developed further by Jon Sobrino.⁶⁰ The crucified peoples are history’s innocent victims, typically the poor. Jesus’s death as an innocent victim of the Roman Empire demonstrates his solidarity with the crucified peoples. He and the crucified peoples are mutually explanatory.⁶¹ In the crucified peoples, the concrete shape of the sorts of political forces whose resistance to the reign of God led to Jesus’s death are vividly seen. In the death of Jesus, God’s saving solidarity with history’s victims is made manifest.⁶² The reality of Christ’s suffering and its reversal in the resurrection becomes less about “what God does with a dead body,” and instead about “what God does with a victim.”⁶³

However, the point here is not just about solidarity, important as that might be, but about the crucified peoples as a locus of encounter with Christ. Sobrino speaks of the evangelizing potential of crucified peoples. This potential is expressed by the fact that the crucified people embody genuinely humanizing values, which present an invitation to renounce the dehumanizing distortions of Western culture.⁶⁴ Further, crucified peoples expose the sin of the world, which provides an opportunity for repentance.⁶⁵ Most significantly for our purposes here, the crucified peoples serve to mediate Christ’s presence. As Sobrino puts it, “To go forth to the poor with the intention of liberating them is to understand God’s vision for the world and to conform to the reality of God. In this historical way the evangelizer becomes ever more Christian and, in the deepest sense of the term, is divinized.”⁶⁶

And so, once more, we see a reciprocity between church and world. Of course the church is to be engaged in service to the world through proclamation, through liberative praxis, and through taking the crucified peoples down from the cross. These activities, however, must be undertaken in full cognizance that the church also stands to gain from the encounter. The rich do not simply give to the poor; they also receive from them.⁶⁷ The church does not simply grant a share in the gospel to the world’s peoples—as though God could not reach them apart from its efforts—but rather itself gains a deepened catholicity.

Conclusion: Beyond God—Church—World or Kingdom—Apostolate—World

Because the church and the world are interpenetrating realities, it follows that schemas such as God—Church—World or Kingdom—Apostolate—World are inadequate. The church’s members are citizens of both the heavenly and the earthly cities, which remain intertwined throughout history.⁶⁸ The church is part of the world, and is called upon to affect the world, even as it is itself affected by the world. The ways in which the church is affected by the world can be either positive—such as gaining a better understanding of itself

⁶⁰ Ellacuría, “Crucified People,” 580–603. On this concept in Ellacuría’s thought see Burke, *Theology of Ellacuría*, 180–185; “Ellacuría’s Soteriology,” 173–177; Sobrino, “Ignacio Ellacuría, the Human Being and the Christian,” 1–67. Sobrino’s development of the concept may be seen in *Principle of Mercy*, 51–56; *Christ the Liberator*, 4–6, 14–15, 43–49; *Church and Poor*, 154. For treatments of the crucified peoples in Sobrino’s thought see Crowley, “Theology in the Light of Human Suffering,” 16–30; Lasalle-Klein, *Blood and Ink*, 289–308.

⁶¹ Sobrino, *Church and Poor*, 123, 154, 171–185; “Communion, Conflict, Solidarity,” 622, 633; *Principle of Mercy*, 51–56, 79–80; *Christ the Liberator*, 4–6, 43, 84, 310. See also Fagan, *An Interpretation of Evangelization*, 140; Lassalle-Klein, *Blood and Ink*, 305, 327–333.

⁶² Ellacuría, “Crucified People,” 584, 592.

⁶³ Sobrino, *Christ the Liberator*, 84.

⁶⁴ Sobrino, *Principle of Mercy*, 80; *No Salvation Outside the Poor*, 46.

⁶⁵ Sobrino, *Principle of Mercy*, 54–55, 70–71, 79; *Church and Poor*, 119–120; *No Salvation Outside the Poor*, 59.

⁶⁶ Sobrino, *Church and Poor*, 295. See also *Principle of Mercy*, 54–56; Lassalle-Klein, *Blood and Ink*, 329–331.

⁶⁷ Sobrino, *No Salvation Outside the Poor*, 41–44.

⁶⁸ *Gaudium et spes*, no. 40.

or human nature, and hence of its message, or learning from philosophies, languages, and cultures—⁶⁹ or negative—such as the rise of atheism,⁷⁰ unjust economic practices (and especially an alignment of the church with a status quo that perpetuates such injustices),⁷¹ or political arrangements that curtail the church's proper mission.⁷² Sometimes, the same development can affect the church both positively and negatively. For instance, *Gaudium et spes* no. 7 notes that changes in psychology and morality have, on the one hand, led to a purifying of religion from superstition, and on the other have led some people to give up on religion altogether.⁷³

This is why the signs of the times must not only be attended to, but also interpreted in light of the gospel. The church has approbations and denunciations to speak in the face of historical developments, and a failure either to take seriously the signs of the times or to interpret them in the light of the gospel will prove detrimental to the church's mandate to engage the world in a fully-orbed mission. While there is a permeable relationship between the church and the world, this is a critical permeability in which the gospel retains the central criterial role. Further, the Holy Spirit, “who fills the entire earth,” leads the people of God to find “true signs of God's presence and purpose in the events which it shares with the rest of modern humanity.”⁷⁴ In other words, God is at work throughout the world, and the church is charged with discovering this work and collaborating with it.

Therefore, the sequence evident in *Gaudium et spes* is more complex than either God—church—world or God—world—church. The church receives the gospel from God, and brings that gospel to the world, from which it discerns the signs of the times, which are to be interpreted in the gospel's light, and the church discerns the work of God beyond its own boundaries, and thus comes to be more truly itself. At the same time, the world is the sphere of God's activity, which means that the world affects the church, which in turn offers the gospel whereby God fulfills, perfects, and exceeds human project. Hence, the church and the world are distinct, but permeable, and there is a constant movement running in both directions between them until the final day's dawn when church and world are both fulfilled in the eschatologically perfect reign of God.

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⁶⁹ Ibid., no. 44. See also Benestad, “Doctrinal Perspectives,” 162–163; Congar, “Church in the Modern World,” 211, 221–222. As Hünermann puts it, “the Council fathers took it for granted that the Christian community profits in many ways from the cultural, social, and economic developments of the human race, and even that in relation to the gospel itself it has, as a result of cultural scientific, and social advances, gained a deeper understanding of its own message and its own gifts.” “Final Weeks of the Council,” 424–425. This then leads to a more dialogical and reciprocal stance toward the world. See, e.g., Hollenbach, “Commentary on *Gaudium et Spes*,” 275; James Gerard McEvoy, “Proclamation as Dialogue,” 875–903.

⁷⁰ *Gaudium et spes*, no. 21.

⁷¹ Ibid., nos. 9, 26–27; *Populorum progressio*, nos. 21, 76–77; CELAM, *Medellín*, 1.3–5; 14.2–7.

⁷² *Gaudium et spes*, no. 42.

⁷³ Ibid., no. 7. See also Moeller, “Preface and Introductory Statement,” 105–107. On this ambiguity more generally see Chenu, “Signes des temps,” 216–217; Hollenbach, “Commentary on *Gaudium et Spes*,” 275; Thils, “L'activité humaine,” 294–297.

⁷⁴ *Gaudium et spes*, no. 11.

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