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## Reception of the Economic Social Teaching of Gaudium et Spes in the United States from 1965-2005

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RECEPTION OF THE ECONOMIC SOCIAL TEACHING  
OF *GAUDIUM ET SPES* IN THE UNITED STATES  
FROM 1965-2005

by

David Daniel Archibald

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,  
Marquette University,  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Historical Theology

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## Introduction

ρίζα γὰρ πάντων τῶν κακῶν ἐστὶν ἡ φιλαργυρία, ἧς τινες ὀρεγόμενοι ἀπεπλανήθησαν  
ἀπὸ τῆς πίστεως καὶ ἑαυτοὺς περιέπειραν ὀδύνας πολλαῖς.

*For the love of money is the root of all evils, and some people in their desire for it have strayed from the faith and have pierced themselves with many pains. -1 Timothy 6:10*

Pope John XXIII was elected on 28 October, 1958. Eighty-nine days later, on 25 January, 1959, “Good Pope John” announced that preparations would begin for the Second Vatican Council--the 21<sup>st</sup> ecumenical council in the history of the Catholic Church, and only the second ecumenical council since the closing of the Council of Trent in 1563. John XXIII’s decision contradicted the notion that he was an “interim pope,” elected to serve as a tranquil leader with a jolly disposition prior to the election of a more dynamic pontiff. His announcement was received in varied manners around the globe. For some the impending council brought great excitement and expectancy. For others the announcement generated concern and doubt. After more than three years of preparation, which included the assessment of *vota*,<sup>1</sup> the Council began on 11 October, 1962. John XXIII died on 3 June, 1963, between the first and second sessions of the Council. Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini, who had been a Secretary of State for the Vatican from 1922 until he was appointed Archbishop of Milan in 1954, was elected pope on 21 June 1963. As Pope Paul VI, he continued and oversaw three sessions of the Council and brought it to a close on 8 December, 1965. At its completion, the Council had produced sixteen official documents which were released for the Church and the world. The

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<sup>1</sup> *Vota* were situational reports from bishops throughout the world which included main areas of concern for the Council to address.

documents include four constitutions, nine decrees, and three declarations. While all of the documents carry authoritative weight, the constitutions form the nucleus of the Council's teachings, as they address the self-understanding, liturgical life, and missionary life of the Church. The decrees target more specified topics and groups within the Church while the declarations focus on topics of significant concern for the Church and the global community. Of the constitutions, the longest and most diverse is *Gaudium et Spes*, which addresses the role of the Church in the modern world. Its topics are numerous because the document was an attempt to address a wide-range of issues from around the globe, and there was great disparity in the conditions of various countries. The renowned, formidable first line of *Gaudium et Spes* states, "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ."<sup>2</sup> Some sufferings the document addresses were most obvious: hunger, extreme poverty, and deficiencies in education and development. The range of other topics in *Gaudium et Spes* span from culture to war, atheism, and technological advancement. The document called Catholics and people of good will to realize that all people must be concerned with the dignity and sacredness of every human life.

*Gaudium et Spes* contains two parts, though it begins with a preface and a narrative description of the situation in the modern world. The preface outlines the contrast between the anguish people were experiencing and the hope of the Gospel, and notes the dichotomy between those with an abundance of wealth and those who live in extreme poverty. The introduction speaks of changes which have occurred in the world

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<sup>2</sup> Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, available online: vatican.va, 1.

as well. Industrialization, urbanization, and the globalized mass media were impacting the world; a growing rejection of religion was also occurring in some countries. A conflict within individuals was also noted between anxieties and peace; between sin and virtue. After the introduction, Part I offers the Church's thought on general ethical principles in four chapters on human dignity, the community of mankind, man's activity in the world, and the role of the Church in the world. These chapters speak of core principles regarding human nature, emphasizing freedom, conscience, the interdependence of all people, and the need for positive human activity that benefits the common good. With the exception of atheism, which receives a bit more attention, Part I of *Gaudium et Spes* does not engage a specific topic in much detail. The transition from Part I to Part II of the document is a movement from general principles to more specific topics. After a brief introduction, Part II delves into matters of special urgency in the modern day. In five chapters the document addresses marriage and family life, the development of culture, economic and social life, political life, and peace among nations. These chapters offer practical, concrete thought on core matters that have challenged the modern world. Specifically, Chapter III, *Economic and Social Life*, contains two sections. The first section addresses economic development while the second concerns general principles of economic life.

After outlining the thesis of this essay, I examine the creation of *Gaudium et Spes* (especially Part II, Chapter III, Section II- on *Certain Principles Governing Socio-Economic Life as a Whole*) and analyze in particular the Church's continuing emphasis on these economic principles after the Council in the writings of representative theologians, Pope Paul VI, the American bishops, and two American theologians.

## The Argument

In an American culture of individualistic materialism, I maintain, the economic teachings of *Gaudium et Spes*, particularly articles 67-72, were necessary to counter that American tendency. In the wake of Vatican II, representative theologians, popes, and American bishops emphasized the economic principles of *Guadium et Spes*, especially those on the communal nature of all earthly goods, and the use of private property in an ethical manner that sees material possessions as a means of serving others and building up the common good. Charitable giving of one's possessions, moreover, is not just a philanthropic option but a human and Christian responsibility. These ethical teachings, I also argue, could have been strengthened by emphasizing more specifically the biblical understanding of tithing as a practical means of executing the communal nature of all possessions.

This paper demonstrates the aptness of the Church's economic teaching in articles 67-72 of *Gaudium et Spes* by first offering a background on the formation of the Constitution in order to give it proper historical context. A review of the core content of *Gaudium et Spes* and then specifically of articles 67-72 will follow. The general review of the Constitution will place its economic teachings within the Church's framework for *Gaudium et Spes*, which was designed to address many issues of ethics and social justice. The section on articles 67-72 will more precisely articulate the economic goals of the Church for the document and will ultimately examine how the Church sought to contest the pervasive individualism and materialism of the mid-twentieth century, which stood in contrast with significant poverty in other parts of the world.

After a historical overview of *Gaudium et Spes* and an explanation of significant teachings of articles 67-72, representative post-conciliar economic writings are examined. Early commentaries on *Gaudium et Spes*, Pope Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio*, the United States bishops' *Economic Justice for All* (1986), and a representative American theological critique of excessive preoccupation with social justice issues demonstrates the on-going post-conciliar reflections on *Gaudium et Spes*. In general, these documents affirm the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes* and build upon its economic teaching by addressing specific areas of economic justice.

### ***Gaudium et Spes: The Process***

Articles 67-72 of *Gaudium et Spes* must be understood within the context of what the Constitution was working to accomplish, which was a broad overview of the Church's response to many issues of social justice. Understanding the rich history of debate and redaction of the Constitution, which was a manifestation of the Council's desire to dialogue with the modern world, provides the background as to why the document included economic teachings. Each of the sixteen documents of the Second Vatican Council has its own rich story. The process behind a document includes preparatory commissions, drafts, presentations, debate, and voting. The Constitution *Dei Verbum*, for example, was a document that underwent spirited debate, and included a papal decision to reconstruct the document at one point. While never requiring a comprehensive second version, the pastoral constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*, has unique facets of its history as well. It is the only major document that did not originate through the early plans of the Council, but rather developed from dialogue on the "floor" of the Council itself.<sup>3</sup> Other documents were prepared and contained topics which were expected due to the extensive preparatory process of the Council. *Gaudium et Spes* came on the table because of concerns of a deficiency in the original conciliar agenda. The initial spark came from Belgian, Cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens<sup>4</sup> on 4 December, 1962, when he addressed concerns regarding the trajectory of the Council.<sup>5</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*,

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<sup>3</sup> Donald R. Campion, S.J., in Abbott, Walter M., ed., *Documents of Vatican II: Foreword to Gaudium et Spes*, 183-198 (New York: American Press, 1966), 183.

<sup>4</sup> Suenens (1904-1996) became a cardinal in 1962, the same year the Council opened. He was archbishop of Mechelen-Brussel from 1961-1979.

<sup>5</sup> Donald R. Campion, S.J., in Abbott, Walter M., ed., *Documents of Vatican II: Foreword to Gaudium et Spes*, 183-198 (New York: American Press, 1966), 184.

though still specifically an unknown at this point, would require work during all four sessions until finally being promulgated on 7 December, 1965, one day prior to the close of the Council.

Suenens, an intellectual who left a significant stamp on the Council, spoke on 4 December, 1962 near the closing of the first session. His speech initiated a new trajectory which would result in the production of *Gaudium et Spes*. Suenens, who in previous writings had differentiated between the Church looking inward (*ad intra*) and looking outward (*ad extra*), received support from Cardinal Montini, who was six months away from becoming Pope Paul VI.<sup>6</sup> Montini asserted the inadequacy of *De Ecclesia*, the early draft on the Church which eventually became *Lumen Gentium*,<sup>7</sup> which placed a new emphasis on dialogue with the modern world. This distanced the Council from negativity toward the modern world that was more characteristic of much of nineteenth-century Roman Catholicism.<sup>8</sup> This desire for the Church to not only look at its interior life but to contemplate and examine the necessary Christian response to the state of the modern world would be a key emphasis in the Council after Suenens's address.

By 27 January, 1963, drafts of seventeen documents, which would be reduced to sixteen by the end of the Council, had been produced. While there would be significant redaction, these documents paved the way for what was to proceed in the remaining three years of conciliar meetings.<sup>9</sup> At the top of the list of the seventeen texts was *De Fontibus*, the attempt to address matters of Scripture, and *De Ecclesia*, the schema on the

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<sup>6</sup> John W. O'Malley, S.J., *What Happened at Vatican II* (Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 157-158.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>9</sup> John W. O'Malley, S.J., *What Happened at Vatican II* (Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 161.

Church. *De Fontibus* would eventually be discarded and redrafted with the end result being *Dei Verbum*, while *De Ecclesia* was the path to *Lumen Gentium*.<sup>10</sup> The last schema, Schema XVII, which would eventually become Schema XIII, was titled, “The Presence of the Church in the Modern World.” The main cardinals who oversaw the document were Italian cardinals Alfredo Ottaviani and Fernando Cento, along with Suenens.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the gaining momentum of several documents, the Council was up for an abrupt change. Pope John XXIII’s health was waning, and he died between the first and second sessions of the Council on 3 June, 1963. Eighteen days later, on 21 June, after two days of prayer and deliberation and six ballots, the cardinals elected Giovanni Battista Montini, the Archbishop of Milan. Montini took the name Paul VI. He was comfortable in Rome, having served in the office of the papal Secretariate of State as a young priest. Paul VI reconvened the Council, and conciliar meetings resumed on 29 September, 1963. Schema XVII, however, would not receive significant attention on the Council floor until 1964.

In the summer of 1964, schema XVII became schema XIII. While the famous first line of *Gaudium et Spes* was already present in the document,<sup>12</sup> formation was only beginning and was not going to be an easy task. Several versions were actually being circulated, which included a Roman text, a Malines<sup>13</sup> text, and a Zurich text, to which

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 162-163.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>12</sup> John W. O’Malley, S.J., *What Happened at Vatican II* (Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 204.

<sup>13</sup> Malines signifies a Belgian text, as Malines denotes the city of Mechelen in north-central Belgium.

Archbishop Karol Wojtyla of Krakow added a Polish text as well.<sup>14</sup> On 20 October, 1964, discussion began on the anticipated draft, *De Ecclesia in Mundo Huius Temporis*, and would last until 10 November. “The very length of time the council spent on this schema at a juncture when few confirmed optimists still held on to a dim hope of concluding the council in November signals both its complexity and the importance the bishops attached to it.”<sup>15</sup> Schema XIII rightly received a significant amount of attention due to its diversity of topics and the fact that the world would be paying attention to the emphases and language that the Church would promulgate. Internally, some bishops considered it the masterpiece of the Council as it was a manifestation of the Church’s ability and commitment to entering into dialogue with the world.<sup>16</sup> Schema XIII did not fail to render spirited conversation and debate, however. Some argued that it was awry in theological orientation due to lacking a balance between the incarnation and the cross.<sup>17</sup> This debate was linked with questioning whether the document was too positive in its attempt to reach out to the world, thereby mitigating the severity of sin and the need for conversion. With the large number of topics that the document covered, it is clear that it would not be able to do everything possible. All documents are limited, but schema XIII had ventured into a vast area with seemingly limitless questions. The German theologian Joseph Ratzinger stated that “one must not expect very much from this schema, which can be nothing other than the beginning of a discussion that must be carried out over the following decades.”<sup>18</sup> Some fathers thought of the document as simply an expression of

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<sup>14</sup> John W. O’Malley, S.J., *What Happened at Vatican II* (Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 204-205.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 232-233.

<sup>16</sup> Giuseppe Alberigo, *A Brief History of Vatican II* (New York: Orbis, 2006), 78.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>18</sup> Giuseppe Alberigo, *A Brief History of Vatican II* (New York: Orbis, 2006), 79.

good will,<sup>19</sup> but it is more than that. Schema XIII expressed concrete points which can be directly put into action. It is the magnitude of potential topics that it could have covered and the diversity of situations in the world that force its generalities. “There is no ‘answer’ to a given problem of economic organization, for example, that applies equally to Ghana, Ireland, the United States, and Communist China,” as Robert McAfee Brown argued.<sup>20</sup>

Some at the Council believed that the schema was constructed with a European or Western bias,<sup>21</sup> and the council fathers were cognizant of this criticism moving forward. The development of *Gaudium et Spes*, on economics and many other issues, however, had to meet the challenge of making statements that represented the culture of the universal Church rather than any singular culture of a geographic area. Questions pertaining to economics make this tension clear as the developmental and economic situations around the globe were vastly different.

Cardinal Giacomo Lecraro of Bologna called the Council’s attention to the “Church’s need for cultural poverty,” which is not ignorance but rather a recognition that the Gospel cannot be reduced to a single cultural scenario.<sup>22</sup> Poverty, as Lecraro examined it, also has doctrinal and practical issues. The wealthy, he asserted, can create greater disparity between classes and fall into the worship of material goods. Lecraro also proposed that the bishops embrace greater simplicity in regard to titles and

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Robert McAfee Brown, in Abbott, Walter M., ed., *Documents of Vatican II: Response to Gaudium et Spes*, 309-316 (New York: American Press, 1966), 309.

<sup>21</sup> Giuseppe Alberigo, *A Brief History of Vatican II* (New York: Orbis, 2006), 79.

<sup>22</sup> Giuseppe Alberigo, *A Brief History of Vatican II* (New York: Orbis, 2006), 80.

clothing;<sup>23</sup> a mindset that has continued to develop under recent pontificates. As the document developed, Cardinal Lecraro's voice was one of many taken into consideration. Dialogue has become the Church's preferred means of approaching the world,<sup>24</sup> and *Gaudium et Spes* strongly promoted the Council's emphasis on dialogue, though it is not the only document that did such.

The 1964 version of *Gaudium et Spes* was also unique in that it contained only four chapters but five appendixes. These appendixes<sup>25</sup> would eventually join the core of the document as Part II.<sup>26</sup> Yet amending the schema was not a quick task as the council fathers heard over 150 speeches about schema XIII and specific issues continued to be raised and debated. Issues such as Marxism came to the table and received mixed responses. "Noteworthy, however, was the repeated call for a condemnation of Marxism and the resistance that call met, most surprisingly from some bishops in Communist lands, who feared that it would make their difficult situation even worse."<sup>27</sup> Other debated topics included nuclear warfare, which was looming as a true threat as well as the primary and secondary ends of marriage. This was brought to discussion due to a section of the schema titled "The Dignity of Marriage and the Family," as well as debates about birth control which were animated by the papal commission on birth control established by Pope John XXIII in 1963.<sup>28</sup> The diversity of opinions at the Council and breadth of

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 80-81.

<sup>24</sup> John W. O'Malley, S.J., *What Happened at Vatican II* (Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 233.

<sup>25</sup> The topics were (1) the human person in society, (2) marriage and the family, (3) the promotion of culture, (4) economic and social issues, (5) human solidarity and peace

<sup>26</sup> John W. O'Malley, S.J., *What Happened at Vatican II* (Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 233.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

<sup>28</sup> John W. O'Malley, S.J., *What Happened at Vatican II* (Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 235-237.

discussions on Schema XIII made a vote on the schema impossible in 1964, and the redaction process would continue in the 1965 session.

The fourth period of the Second Vatican Council took place in 1965 and *De Ecclesia in Mundo Huius Temporis* was still very much on the table. One of the main issues at this time was the length of the document with its two parts and the plethora of topics. Time seemed to be against completion, and Pope Paul VI was strongly opposed to reconvening in 1966. Concern arose due to the numerous crucial issues in the document, as they all deserved adequate attention.<sup>29</sup> Theological and ethical disagreements also continued. For example, the German bishops resisted the document because they believed it presented an overly positive theology, and they were not the only ones who shared that opinion. “Their misgivings about the text were shared by a young, relatively unknown Polish archbishop, Karol Wojtyła, who criticized the document for being too optimistic in its assessment of modern society, which groaned in some parts of the world under the oppression of materialism and consumerism and in others under the atheistic nihilism of Communism.”<sup>30</sup> Birth control and the nuclear arms race also were being discussed and debated extensively;<sup>31</sup> issues which John XXIII, Paul VI, and John Paul II each addressed in their pontificates.

From September in 1965 until the document was ratified and then formally promulgated as a Constitution on 7 December, a summary of particular arguments is provided by Council historian John O’Malley. On 21 September when Archbishop Garrone of Toulouse introduced an expanded version of the schema, it still did not have

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>31</sup> John W. O’Malley, S.J., *What Happened at Vatican II* (Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 249.

the support of some influential German theologians such as Joseph Ratzinger and Karl Rahner. “The Germans felt that the theological foundations of the schema were weak, the tone too optimistic, and the whole enterprise too immature to allow for much more from the council than a letter or message.”<sup>32</sup> However, in time some of the Germans came to offer more support for the schema which was debated for three days. The conversation included a general question regarding whether the document was indeed a constitution which by definition is a “fundamental law.”<sup>33</sup> Specific matters of deliberation included whether the document should explicitly condemn Communism. Some bishops were hoping for a blatant and direct rejection of Communism while others desired a more cautious approach. The final decision was somewhat of a compromise. “At the insistence of a petition organized by the International Group, it referred to former papal condemnations without mentioning the word.”<sup>34</sup> The ends of marriage also received significant scrutiny. There was dialogue and debate regarding whether the procreative and unitive objectives of marriage should be listed in a hierarchical manner. The document ultimately refrained from such a ranking and on birth control it did not expand beyond what the Church had already proclaimed.<sup>35</sup> The debate on birth control, however, continued around the world in the 1960s, and Pope John XXIII’s commission on the issue studied the matter in great detail. This led some to believe that the Church’s teaching was going to have a significant change,<sup>36</sup> though the release of *Humanae Vitae* in 1968 put an end to those expectations. The popes of the 1960s were open to listening

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 258-259.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>35</sup> John W. O’Malley, S.J., *What Happened at Vatican II* (Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 265-266.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 266.

and to dialogue, but Paul VI resisted any attempts to approve artificial means of birth control. The sections on economic and social life in Part II did not receive the scrutiny that marriage and birth control did, but there was concern “that the treatment was too Western, too optimistic about technological progress, and added nothing to papal social encyclicals.”<sup>37</sup> Clearly economic and social issues carried weight in the 1960s, however, as the points in the document would be followed by multiple social encyclicals from each of the subsequent popes. In particular would come *Populorum Progressio* (1967) in which Paul VI addressed in part the duties of wealthy countries to assist with the growth and development of poorer countries.

The final preparatory period of schema XIII occurred during a break in official conciliar meetings, from 20 November until 30 November, 1965. Debate and papal intervention were still to come, in particular regarding birth control, but the document was on its way toward a final draft.<sup>38</sup> In the end, on 7 December, 1965, one day before the final Mass and closing of the Second Vatican Council, a vote was taken on the constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, On the Church in the Modern World. It passed emphatically with 2,309 bishops voting in favor of its promulgation and 75 opposed.<sup>39</sup> The document would be given to the world.

It is clear that the voice of Cardinal Suenens brought the council fathers on an unplanned journey that turned into one of the core documents of the Second Vatican Council. It is not only remarkable that such a document was initiated on the floor of St. Peter’s, but also that the process included enthusiasm, doubt, expansion, and significant

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 284-285.

<sup>39</sup> John W. O’Malley, S.J., *What Happened at Vatican II* (Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 288.

debate. Paul VI maintained that dialogue had to be the heart of the text.<sup>40</sup> This was a dramatic shift from nineteenth and early twentieth century statements about the Church's relationship with the world which tended to be dominated by addressing or condemning the negative realities in society and within cultures. The 1960s had significant problems as did the nineteenth century, but the Church chose to emphasize commonalities and positive realities alongside calling Catholics and all people of good will to take responsibility for a better world. The Church and the world are in relationship, and “the words that (*Gaudium et Spes*) uses to express the relationship are words of mutuality, friendship, partnership, cooperation—and dialogue.”<sup>41</sup> There is also a secondary theme of dignity, which is another element that boosts the positivity that has caused the document to be both lauded and criticized. “The text praises the dignity of freedom, the dignity of conscience, the dignity of marriage, the dignity of human culture, and, finally, the dignity of the human person.”<sup>42</sup> In hindsight, even though there were three years of preparation for the Council, a document that was not proposed until the Council began, made a long journey. From discussion in St. Peter's Basilica to a schema, to debate and redaction, a document was born. When promulgated the day before the Second Vatican Council ended, it had become a Constitution—one of the core documents of the age.

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

### ***Gaudium et Spes*—A Synopsis of the Document**

Prior to reviewing articles 67-72 of *Gaudium et Spes*, it is important to survey the document in general. This synopsis provides an understanding of the broad nature of the document, and why economic teachings, while important, were only a small part of the final draft.

The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World resounds today as a ground-breaking kind of encyclical, due to its commitment to positivity and dialogue amidst a world in which secular attitudes had taken root. It also stands out because of its volume, as it contains over 33,000 words, and the sizeable number of topics it speaks to. “*Gaudium et Spes* is an unusually lengthy conciliar text, one that inevitably repeats itself as it explores basic doctrinal issues in the four chapters of its first part, and then undertakes a series of pastoral applications to urgent contemporary issues in the chapters of the second half.”<sup>43</sup> The text is intentionally broad. It was not written to completely respond to any single issue in a particular place, but rather seeks to offer the wisdom of the Gospel as it pertains to ethical issues from around the world.

*Gaudium et Spes* begins with a Preface. The first line, the “joys and hopes” statement, immediately typifies the unity that both the document and the Council desired to proclaim between the Church and the world. It is a statement of solidarity and recognition which has caught the eye of many. Rather than addressing modern moral issues solely by explaining and condemning evil, *Gaudium et Spes* makes it clear that a Christian is not a member of a clique, but rather a member of the human family. The

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<sup>43</sup> Donald R. Campion, S.J., in Abbott, Walter M., ed., *Documents of Vatican II: Foreword to Gaudium et Spes*, 183-198 (New York: American Press, 1966), 185.

second paragraph of the Constitution also points toward an attitude of unity by directly stating that it is written “to the whole of humanity.”<sup>44</sup> The tone for the document was set, and it was clearly unlike the statements of the First Vatican Council in which declarations of *anathema* were focal teachings. The Preface then moves on to address the state of the modern world, especially human advancement and developments in technology. It also explains that material flourishing has impacted religious practice and often coincided with an abandonment of faith.<sup>45</sup> The dichotomy of development and suffering is noted among the basic questions that man continues to ask as the text states, “What is this sense of sorrow, of evil, of death, which continues to exist despite so much progress?”<sup>46</sup> The Preface of *Gaudium et Spes* clearly defined an audience, a tone, and a recognition of the world that contrasted with Church statements of the past.

Part I of *Gaudium et Spes* contains four chapters. Chapter one is on human dignity and examines elements of the uniqueness of the human person, human freedom, conscience, and the root of human dignity “which lies in man’s call to communion with God.”<sup>47</sup> Also noteworthy is the first chapter’s handling of atheism. Different types of atheism as well as various reasons that people profess atheism are addressed. The Constitution recognizes the seriousness of atheism and holds people accountable for their own freedom, however it also recognizes that “believers can have more than a little to do with the birth of atheism. To the extent that they neglect their own training in the faith, or teach erroneous doctrine, or are deficient in their religious, moral or social life, they must

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<sup>44</sup> Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, available online: vatican.va, 2.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

be said to conceal rather than reveal the authentic face of God and religion.”<sup>48</sup> The ability of the Church to critique both non-believers and believers is another characteristic of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, as is clear in *Gaudium et Spes*.

Chapter two of Part I addresses the solidarity and unity of mankind, stating that God “has willed that all men should constitute one family and treat one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”<sup>49</sup> Along with promoting human solidarity, chapter two calls on the social order to act at the service of man,<sup>50</sup> and includes a list of actions which are condemned, maintaining the theme of human dignity. This list of evils demonstrates that *Gaudium et Spes* was written to cover a broad range of topics in brief, rather than to present a narrow thesis statement in great detail:

Furthermore, whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia or willful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, torments inflicted on body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself; whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where men are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others of their like are infamies indeed. They poison human society, but they do more harm to those who practice them than those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are supreme dishonor to the Creator.<sup>51</sup>

In chapter three of Part I, *Gaudium et Spes* shifts attention to the activity and works of man in the world. It is clear to affirm that God’s existence and grace, contrary to being opposed to human freedom and creativity, instead coincides with and permits them. Human flourishing, then, is the desire of God. The document states, “Thus, far from thinking that works produced by man’s own talent and energy are in opposition to

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<sup>48</sup> Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, available online: vatican.va, 19.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

God's power, and that the rational creature exists as a kind of rival to the Creator, Christians are convinced that the triumphs of the human race are a sign of God's grace and the flowering of His own mysterious design."<sup>52</sup> The Constitution is, in a way, articulating an oft-quoted maxim attributed to St. Irenaeus--"The glory of God is man fully alive." Chapter three defends against the modern atheistic notion that we are our own masters or our own magisterium. It also asserts that human development and striving are gifts which ought not be stifled. This positive teaching once again is combined with a warning about modern errors which omit God or even despise recognition of Him.

Chapter four summarizes the role of the Church in the modern world. It is the heart of the document. Of special note in this chapter is the positive outreach to other Christians who work for the Catholic Church's mission on earth. "The Catholic Church gladly holds in high esteem the things which other Christian Churches and ecclesial communities have done or are doing cooperatively by way of achieving the same goal."<sup>53</sup> A developed ecumenical attitude pervades the documents of the Second Vatican Council which was another shift in tone and emphasis. Regarding social life, the Church "is bound to no particular form of human culture, nor to any political, economic or social system."<sup>54</sup> This does not mean that the Church is apolitical, however. Rather, the Church, because of unity with Christ, is able to promote and build unity among all people, even those from very different cultures, locations, and political backgrounds.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, available online: vatican.va, 34.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>55</sup> Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, available online: vatican.va, 42.

The Gospel can permeate any culture and can unite all believers to work for the common good.

The Second Vatican Council was pastoral in nature rather than solely doctrinal. One of the characteristics of the pastoral emphasis is the willingness of the council fathers to acknowledge human errors while still maintaining the divine protection that the Deposit of Faith has received. While discussing the Church's call in the world, *Gaudium et Spes* states:

Although by the power of the Holy Spirit the Church will remain the faithful spouse of her Lord and will never cease to be the sign of salvation on earth, still she is very well aware that among her members, both clerical and lay, some have been unfaithful to the Spirit of God during the course of many centuries; in the present age, too, it does not escape the Church how great a distance lies between the message she offers and the human failings of those to whom the Gospel is entrusted.<sup>56</sup>

Historical failure by those in communion with the Church is not a valid reason to reject faithful belief and fulfilling the mission of the Gospel. Chapter four asserts, "since they have an active role to play in the whole life of the Church, laymen are not only bound to penetrate the world with a Christian spirit, but are also called to be witnesses to Christ in all things in the midst of human society."<sup>57</sup> The call to holiness and missionary role of every individual in communion with the Church was emphasized at the Second Vatican Council.

Near the end of chapter four, which is also the conclusion of Part I, *Gaudium et Spes* asserts an element of mutuality regarding social development, though with a hierarchical qualification. The Church benefits from human and social development including the works of philosophers and even from those who persecute the Gospel.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, available online: [vatican.va](http://vatican.va), 44.

The Church, in turn, builds up society through the proclamation of and carrying out of the Gospel, and salvation is the supreme goal. “While helping the world and receiving many benefits from it, the Church has a single intention: that God's kingdom may come, and that the salvation of the whole human race may come to pass.”<sup>59</sup> Part I ends by drawing the Church back to the central truths of the faith—knowledge of the Lord, transformation of the world, and the promise of salvation.

Part II of *Gaudium et Spes*, which was originally drafted as an appendix, moves into more specific issues that were facing the world in the 1960s and continue to be pertinent today. Part II is titled, “Some Problems of Special Urgency,” but the topics are broad enough that the half century after the Council by no means rendered these problems obsolete. Chapter one begins by addressing marriage and family life. This is an appropriate beginning as marriage and family is the base cell of social interaction, and also because of the wide range of problems that marriage and family life sustained in the twentieth century. As is typical in documents of the Second Vatican Council, a positive recognition of the family unit is mentioned along with dangers that the world is facing. Polygamy, divorce, and so-called free love are mentioned specifically. It also explains that “married love is too often profaned by excessive self-love, the worship of pleasure and illicit practices against human generation.”<sup>60</sup> The goal of the chapter is to offer guidance to those who want to live authentically the vocation to married life.

Authentic marriage is defined throughout chapter one. It is defined by intimate union, intimate partnership, and an ordering to the procreation and education of children.

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

It also has an origin rooted in God and His laws.<sup>61</sup> The sacramental power of marriage is addressed as well. “Christian spouses have a special sacrament by which they are fortified and receive a kind of consecration in the duties and dignity of their state. By virtue of this sacrament, as spouses fulfill their conjugal and family obligation, they are penetrated with the spirit of Christ, which suffuses their whole lives with faith, hope and charity.”<sup>62</sup> The vocation of openness to children and the gift that children are to parents is also clearly articulated. The 1960s was a time in history that needed this chapter in a great way. It provides the true beauty and goodness of holy marriage while not shying away from mentioning the profanation which can occur through adultery or divorce.<sup>63</sup> The fundamental importance of raising and educating children also receives significant mention as it states that “children are really the supreme gift of marriage” and that in procreation and education of children parents are “cooperators with the love of God the Creator.”<sup>64</sup>

Paragraph 51 of chapter one ventured into one of the highly debated areas of *Gaudium et Spes*. After denouncing acts which are “unspeakable,” namely abortion and infanticide, it made brief mention of birth control. Birth control was a serious topic for the Council both because of the wide-ranging opinions of the day and also because of the commission Pope John XXIII had created in 1963. The Constitution uses the term “birth control” only once, and never articulates the term “contraception.” Short of saying nothing, the document delves into a theological point regarding Church teaching, including the teaching that would come through *Humanae Vitae* in 1968, but it does not

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<sup>61</sup> Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, available online: vatican.va, 48.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

get specific about methods of birth control. It states, “when there is question of harmonizing conjugal love with the responsible transmission of life, the moral aspects of any procedure does not depend solely on sincere intentions or on an evaluation of motives, but must be determined by objective standards... Relying on these principles, sons of the Church may not undertake methods of birth control which are found blameworthy by the teaching authority of the Church in its unfolding of the divine law.”<sup>65</sup> While this statement was cautiously general, a more specific Church teaching on birth control was only three years away.

After focusing on marriage and family, the smallest building block of society, Part II of *Gaudium et Spes* shifts to large-scale issues. The development of culture (chapter 2), economic and social life (chapter 3), the political sphere (chapter 4), and the promotion of peace between nations (chapter 5) each receive a chapter. Regarding culture in chapter two, the Constitution focuses on the fact that cultures are dynamic and developmental. Culture must be at the service of the human person and directed to the common good.<sup>66</sup> Education plays a major role in how and to what degree culture develops. Education starts first and foremost in the family, but the increased circulation of books and developments in technology were making it more possible to “to free most of humanity from the misery of ignorance,”<sup>67</sup> and opportunities for advanced education have only increased in the modern day.

I shall consider chapter 3 in the next section of the paper and here focus briefly on chapter 4 (The Life of the Political Community”) and chapter 5 (The Fostering of Peace

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<sup>65</sup> Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, available online: vatican.va, 51.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-61.

and the Promotion of a Community of Nations). The twentieth century had already seen two *world* wars and an array of governmental structures, some of which were fascist and denigrating to human freedom. Peace is not solely the end of war. Rather, peace entails both an absence of war and an “enterprise of justice,” rooted in the active choice “to respect other men and peoples and their dignity.”<sup>68</sup> In Section 1 of chapter 5, which is titled “The Avoidance of War,” the right of legitimate defense is reaffirmed since human fallibility renders war a continuing possibility.<sup>69</sup> Section 1 also responds to growing technological developments in warfare, part of a dramatic growth that occurred throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The arms race is condemned as insufficient for bringing about peace and Christians are called to work for its termination.<sup>70</sup>

Prior to a concluding synopsis, Section 2 of chapter 5 speaks about collaboration within the international community, with a focus on development of poor or struggling nations. It asserts that economic and social structures are fallible and sometimes in need of restructuring, and that it was the duty of wealthier nations to share goods and seek means of distributing food and providing education throughout the world.<sup>71</sup> As travel, globalization, and international connections had increased dramatically in the previous century, the Church exhorted all men to heed duties that reached farther than before.

*Gaudium et Spes* does not contain a conclusion by name, but articles 91-93 serve as such. The final statements recognize that the Constitution is deliberately general due to the fact that there are so many differing cultures and situations in the world. It also

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<sup>68</sup> Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, available online: vatican.va, 78.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 86-87.

calls all believers and non-believers alike to promote peace and good will.<sup>72</sup> Key themes of the Council such as the desire for dialogue are reaffirmed, along with the call of the Church to charity and service of the world.<sup>73</sup> Though broad, these topics include some of the emphases that, while common in our world today, stood out significantly in 1965.

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<sup>72</sup> Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, available online: [vatican.va](http://vatican.va), 91.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-93.

## **Analysis of Principles Governing Socio-Economic Life**

In this section I focus my analysis on Part II of *Gaudium et Spes*, chapter 3, “Socio-Economic Life,” the heart of which, I argue, is Section 2, entitled “Certain Principles Governing Socio-Economic Life as a Whole.” An overview of Section 2 provides clarity as to why articles 67-72 offer only a brief and general discourse on economics. This fits the nature and intent of the Constitution as a whole, while emphasizing the importance of the Church’s teachings on economics. An examination of articles 67-72 shows that the Church was offering an introduction to an economic hermeneutic which would need to be more thoroughly examined in the aftermath of the Council.

Section 2 continued the global vision of the world that was a general characteristic of the Council. “There is,” as Donald R. Campion argued in regard to this section, “an explicit openness to such communitarian patterns of ownership as one might encounter in some parts of Africa or Asia. Here is one of the clearest examples of successful efforts to rid the document of the overly Europeanized outlook and tone that characterized initial drafts of the document.”<sup>74</sup> Significant issues for developed countries in both the east and west are part of the section as well. Theologian Robert McAfee Brown considers paragraphs 63-72 as some of the best segments of the entire Constitution and notes that the chapter contains some of the highlights of the social encyclicals which preceded the document. “The reiteration of the rights of collective bargaining, of unionizing and striking, are set forth unambiguously, and there are

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<sup>74</sup> Donald R. Campion, S.J., in Abbott, Walter M., ed., *Documents of Vatican II: Foreword to Gaudium et Spes*, 183-198 (New York: American Press, 1966), 192.

passages on the need for land reform that will be helpful to Churches in underdeveloped areas and parts of the world where feudal attitudes still prevail.”<sup>75</sup> Amidst matters as specific as collective bargaining and striking, however, it is clear that there is a grand theme throughout the section. “The *leitmotif* of this section is the dignity of the human person.”<sup>76</sup> Everywhere in the document, as is thematic throughout all sixteen conciliar writings, handling the plights of the human person begins with recognition of the inherent, priceless sanctity of each human being. Specifically, though, Part II, Chapter III, Section II, can be summarized by five pervasive themes. The first theme pertains to labor being person-centered. The second theme addresses the dignity of work and the right to private property. The third theme entails the purpose of goods and the Church’s teaching on the social nature of material goods. A fourth theme explains core rights of workers including the right to just working conditions. Finally, the fifth theme expands on property and wealth, explaining some of the duties Christians have regarding earthly goods.

The section on socio-economic life unabashedly declares that economics are person-centered and at the service of families and communities of people. “This labor... comes immediately from the person... By his labor a man ordinarily supports himself and his family, is joined to his fellow men and serves them.”<sup>77</sup> Labor, like other aspects of social life, renders the potential for love, as work offer the opportunity to “exercise genuine charity.”<sup>78</sup> Unity is far from automatic in economic activity, however. The

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<sup>75</sup> Robert McAfee Brown, in Abbott, Walter M., ed., *Documents of Vatican II: Response to Gaudium et Spes*, 309-316 (New York: American Press, 1966), 314.

<sup>76</sup> Donald R. Campion, S.J., in Abbott, Walter M., ed., *Documents of Vatican II: Foreword to Gaudium et Spes*, 183-198 (New York: American Press, 1966), 191.

<sup>77</sup> Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, available online: vatican.va, 67.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

document recognizes that economic life can be harmful to man as work can be manipulated as though it is an end in itself. *Gaudium et Spes* states, “It happens too often... that workers are reduced to the level of being slaves to their own work... The entire process of productive work, therefore, must be adapted to the needs of the person and to his way of life, above all to his domestic life, especially in respect to mothers and families.”<sup>79</sup> Section II implicitly rejects the subjection of humans to material output or financial gain. Instead, labor is a means of human flourishing, building community, and assurance that families can live with their rights and needs met. Slave labor, child labor, and the over-glorification of production are all problems which place material things over human dignity and are therefore rejected. Labor and economic life must be focused on human prosperity.

Along with the need for socio-economic life to be person-centered, Section II addresses the rights of workers and the nature of private property. Since labor can be a means of loving others, the Church recognizes work as a fundamental human right which the Lord has taken part in through his own hands in Nazareth and also through his redemptive work of salvation. “From this there follows for every man the duty of working faithfully and also the right to work.”<sup>80</sup> Labor has both a practical role and a spiritual realm. It offers laborers the opportunity to “unfold their own abilities and personality,”<sup>81</sup> and also the possibility of building the Kingdom of God through service of others. It is so important that the Church identifies work, which has many forms, as a human right. Other rights also must be respected for those who labor justly. It is morally

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, available online: [vatican.va](http://vatican.va), 67.

licit for workers to form and freely take part in unions and to go on strike in certain cases and especially when “sincere dialogue” has taken place.<sup>82</sup> Work must also not become the ultimate priority of one’s life. Laborers have the duty to give effort and energy in their employment and to work responsibly, yet work remains only one element of a person’s life. Workers “should all enjoy sufficient rest and leisure to cultivate their familial, cultural, social, and religious life. They should also have the opportunity freely to develop the energies and potentialities which perhaps they cannot bring to much fruition in their professional work.”<sup>83</sup> A lived faith, family, and recreation are all important elements of life apart from labor, and yet all are connected to labor as well. Another right addressed in Section II regards the nature of property and ownership of property.

Church teaching on private property is not a finely drawn out topic in *Gaudium et Spes*, but it was a significant topic, especially given that, in 1965, the world had seen a century of communist systems. The Church had long condemned communism and socialism, but understanding how to fully define socialism and whether any beliefs might align between socialist systems and Church teaching, even in part, is something that could be expanded upon. Church teaching on property is not based on a political system, and given the Church’s fundamental call to charity, the nature of ownership must be seen and understood in a way that differs from the status quo in American society.

Section II states, “Since property and other forms of private ownership of external goods contribute to the expression of the personality, and since, moreover, they furnish one an occasion to exercise his function in society and in the economy, it is very

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

important that the access of both individuals and communities to some ownership of external goods be fostered.”<sup>84</sup> In clearly accepting the right of individuals and groups to attain and maintain private property, the Church denounces the economic and materialistic standards of communism. Private ownership of material possessions provides a facet of freedom for individuals to learn and strive as they choose, which can present different means for individuals to experience joy and bring the Gospel to many areas of society. Section II articulates this in stating, “Private property or some ownership of external goods confers on everyone a sphere wholly necessary for the autonomy of the person and the family, and it should be regarded as an extension of human freedom.”<sup>85</sup> While the right for individuals to own personal property is clearly defended, the stance of the Church is that the right to private property entails moral limits. The end goals of property must be considered, and this includes its communal purpose.

Private ownership of property is a means of expression and self-development. When it is seen and used properly, it also promotes rationality and justice. Like any human right, however, the right to own personal property also coincides with duties. These duties begin with the fact that “by its very nature private property has a social quality.”<sup>86</sup> The unity of mankind and the call to charity make property, even that which is privately owned, more than just a means of individual enjoyment. Since “God intended the earth with everything contained in it for the use of all human beings and peoples,” consideration must be given to the “universal destination of earthly goods.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, available online: vatican.va, 71.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, available online: vatican.va, 71.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

The earth and the goods of the earth were not given by God to a sub-group of people. The earth has been given to all who inhabit it and therefore no one can claim that resources of the earth have been designated for their own good alone. Rather, “God intended the earth and everything contained in it for the use of all human beings and peoples. Thus... created goods should be in abundance for all in like manner.”<sup>88</sup> These statements are not accepting of socialism or communism, nor do they demand sameness. Instead they help us understand the social quality of possessions, and therefore they “should be able to benefit not only (the owner) but also others.”<sup>89</sup>

The universal destination of earthly goods, in conjunction with justice, means that Christians and all people are bound by other social principles regarding property as well. From ancient times in the Church through the modern day, the call for assisting the poor has been present, and for men “to do so not merely out of their superfluous goods.”<sup>90</sup> Sharing money or material needs with the poor should be done generously, and in grave situations the Church even permits the poor to take what is needed from the riches of others, which again derives from the law of the universal destination of goods.<sup>91</sup>

Although Church teaching vehemently rejects socialism and communism, it does not reject the existence of public or social property. Such property does not take away human freedom but actually promotes it. Public libraries, schools, and parks for example, are not socialistic or communistic by nature, nor do they deny rights of private ownership. These types of public property offer opportunities for human flourishing without forcing anyone to take part. Rights inherent to the public authorities who oversee

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

public property also exist provided that the authorities act in virtue. For example, “Goods can be transferred to the public domain... according to the demands and within the limits of the common good, and with fair compensation.”<sup>92</sup> This means that it is acceptable for an official authority, like a state government, to claim property as public space if it is in service of the common good. Monetary payment or payment through land or goods to those losing property is demanded by justice, however. The federal government claiming a patch of farmland to construct a plant during World War II is an example of such a scenario. Farmers losing their land would need to have been appropriately compensated. Another right of public authorities pertaining to private property entails the ability to oversee the use of property and to create laws “to prevent anyone from abusing his private property to the detriment of the common good.”<sup>93</sup> This right of governments and public authorities derives from the social nature of all property. It is never licit for an individual to use private property in a manner that renders the possibility of serious harm to others. Something as simple as a government regulating norms of home inspection standards is an example of this type of prevention of abuse. The right to private property never promotes a laissez-faire approach to what can be done with private property. The protection of society and the call to use goods in charity, which always includes consideration of the common good, must be discerned.

A fourth theme in Section II pertains to other areas of economic justice--in particular the right of safe working conditions and a just wage for laborers. As usual, the Church upholds the duties of workers to put significant effort into their labor in order to merit these rights, however these rights are universal for genuine laborers. Regarding

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<sup>92</sup> Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, available online: [vatican.va](http://vatican.va), 71.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

wage, the document states that “remuneration for labor is to be such that man may be furnished the means to cultivate worthily his own material, social, cultural, and spiritual life and that of his dependents, in view of the function and productiveness of each one, the conditions of the factory or workshop, and the common good.”<sup>94</sup> This statement means that work is a way of participating in society that must benefit other forms of participation in society, both in the family and in the public domain. It also recognizes that fair payment does not mean a specific, universal pay scale. Employers must discern what a just wage is based on their field of labor. Yet promoting laborers to fulfill their religious, familial, and social duties must be at the forefront of thought when considering just remuneration. Workers, when possible, should also be able to present their voices and partake in decisions regarding “economic and social conditions” within the workplace by speaking for themselves or through their elected representatives. This does not negate the role or authority of administrators or leadership but calls leaders to act in accordance with the fact that all people in their company have human dignity as children of God.<sup>95</sup>

In its statements about impoverished farms, Section II indirectly alludes to a universal principle of justice; that of just working conditions. It states, “According to the different cases, therefore, reforms are necessary: that income may grow, working conditions should be improved, security in employment increased, and an incentive to working on one’s own initiative given.”<sup>96</sup> Justice toward laborers includes providing working conditions that are safe and provide the possibility of flourishing. A just wage,

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<sup>94</sup> Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, available online: [vatican.va](http://vatican.va), 67.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>96</sup> Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, available online: [vatican.va](http://vatican.va), 71.

safety, and an encouraging atmosphere that helps workers thrive and not just suffer through work, are good for the dignity of man and the development of nations.

A fifth principle of Section II is rooted in the call for economic life to build up the poor and promote development, especially in countries that are most in need. These points are summarized in the statement, “this sacred council urges all, both individuals and governments... to share and employ their earthly goods, according to the ability of each, especially by supporting individuals or peoples with the aid by which they may be able to help and develop themselves.”<sup>97</sup> It also states that there is a duty to “bear in mind the urgent needs of underdeveloped countries or regions.”<sup>98</sup> Strengthened by a “spirit of poverty,” Christian charity is needed to promote this development which is directed both toward human prosperity and peace in the world.<sup>99</sup> The accumulation of goods or wealth cannot be seen as an end in itself, however. Section II warns that, if the social nature of property is disregarded, two problems can result. On one side, a sense of greed and materialism can grow due to an excessive desire to attain wealth. On the other side, with this desire out of order, a potential disordered response would be to call the right to own or control property into question,<sup>100</sup> leading toward socialism or communism.

Section II provides a general blueprint for avoiding the pitfalls of both materialism and the rejection of private property. It begins with a man-centered recognition of human dignity rooted in Christ. The lens of human dignity leads then to a recognition that wealth and property have both private and social components. From here one can draw out principles of justice regarding the right to work, monetary

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>100</sup> Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, available online: vatican.va, 71.

compensation, the priority of helping the poor, and other elements which all have their root in human dignity.

### Post-Conciliar Commentaries on Socio-Economic Life

This section examines a selection of post-Vatican II commentators on the economic principles of articles 67-72 from *Gaudium et Spes*. Church documents from ecumenical councils can be more fully understood in the aftermath of their promulgation by demonstrating how they have been received and interpreted. This examination begins with commentaries from Robert McAfee Brown and Alois Grillmeier—two theologians who offered interpretations of the document in the years immediately following the Council. Brown wrote commentaries amended to an English translation of the conciliar documents themselves, while Grillmeier authored an immense five volume commentary on the Council prior to 1970. Other receptions and commentaries are offered through Pope Paul VI’s encyclical, *Populorum Progressio* (1967), and the Catholic Church’s extraordinary synod in 1985 which served as a guide for proper interpretation of the Second Vatican Council. The extraordinary synod included a section titled, “Importance of the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*”. It contains a general statement that affirms the Constitution but also explains that times had changed in the twenty years since the end of the Council. It reads:

We affirm the great importance and timeliness of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*. At the same time, however, we perceive that the signs of our time are in part different from the time of the Council, with greater problems and anguish. Today, in fact, everywhere in the world we witness an increase in hunger, oppression, injustice and war, sufferings, terrorism and other forms of violence of every sort. This requires a new and more profound theological reflection in order to interpret these signs in the light of the Gospel.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Synod of Bishops, *Final Report of the 1985 Extraordinary Synod (ES)*, available online: <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library>, Part 2, section D, article 1.

Representative American Catholic commentaries and interpretations of *Gaudium et Spes*' economic principles demonstrate further the continuing reflections on social-economic themes in a particular country. The American bishops' pastoral document, *Economic Justice for All* (1986), and the theological critiques of Cardinal Avery Dulles and J. Brian Benestad illustrate something of the continuing impact of Vatican II.

Robert McAfee Brown explained the social emphasis of *Gaudium et Spes* as a whole. He wrote, “‘The Church in the Modern World’ is very clear that man *qua* man must be understood in social terms. He is not an individual who becomes social; he is a being whose individuality can be understood only in and through his social relations.”<sup>102</sup> The articles on economic and social life in the document manifest this principle as they focus on rights and duties which always influence people. Defending the rights of collective bargaining, unionizing, and striking, as well as addressing land reform on behalf of underdeveloped areas<sup>103</sup> are examples of the communal approach to economics that the document maintains. Analysis of all sixteen documents of the Second Vatican Council went far beyond general observations.

Commentaries on *Gaudium et Spes* and all the documents were written in the years immediately after their release. One lengthy commentary was compiled by and edited by a German Jesuit priest and cardinal-deacon, Alois Grillmeier. It was edited by Catholic theologian Herbert Vorgrimler (1929-2014), and published in 1969. The commentary includes an assessment of articles 67-72 of *Gaudium et Spes* which was written by Oswald von Nell-Breuning, a German Jesuit priest who had a significant role

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<sup>102</sup> Robert McAfee Brown, in Abbott, Walter M., ed., *Documents of Vatican II: Response to Gaudium et Spes*, 309-316 (New York: American Press, 1966), 313.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 314.

in drafting Pope Pius XI's encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931). This encyclical, meaning, "In the 40<sup>th</sup> Year," was written 40 years after Pope Leo XIII's most famous work on society and economics, *Rerum Novarum* (1891). Von Nell-Breuning's history with Catholic social teaching renders his commentary significant, as he was clearly well-versed in Catholic social teachings from *Rerum Novarum* to the Second Vatican Council.

Von Nell-Breuning explains some of the history behind *Gaudium et Spes* in addressing the dual emphasis on both the individual and social nature of property. The balance between opposite views on property is part of what the document addresses:

In the face of the attack of Marxist socialism, the Church found itself obliged to defend the institution of property with great determination (Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*). As opposed to misinterpretations of Leo XIII's teaching on property in the direction of liberalism Pius XI was obliged once again in *Quadragesimo Anno* to deal thoroughly with the question of property in order to make clear its two aspects, individual and social, both equally important.<sup>104</sup>

Articles 67-72 of *Gaudium et Spes* clearly reaffirm that separating individual property from communal responsibility is fundamentally problematic. This message is a development dating back to *Rerum Novarum*.

Von Nell-Breuning also addresses a question regarding the nature of a business enterprise rooted in the statements of article 68. He notes a conflict in the modern world regarding two views of the nature of a business enterprise. One view is that an employer seeks manpower in order to fulfill a goal or purpose determined by his or her own interests. The other view sees business as the cooperation of persons who aim at production but through contributions of different kinds. The Council clearly embraces the second view as the Church upholds business as "an association of persons."

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<sup>104</sup> Alois Grillmeier, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, Volume 5*, edited by Herbert Vorgrimler, et al. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 297.

Production and profit are legitimate goals of business, but “the living business enterprise, that is, the people who are engaged in some corporate undertaking,” must be the primary focus of the enterprise.<sup>105</sup> While this may seem like an obvious teaching of the Church and is clear when written, it is more difficult to accomplish in practice. In the United States and other capitalist markets, profit and gain can be easily exalted in the business mindset. Collaboration, human flourishing, and helping the poor sound great to almost everyone, but it is a more difficult practice to make the outcomes of business subservient to the community of persons.

The rationale for going on strike is another area of von Nell-Breuning’s analysis. He notes that the Church had handled questions regarding the legitimacy of strikes prior to the Council, but that the question of whether an offensive strike is acceptable remained unanswered. This type of strike is accepted by the Council as a last resort. He also mentions the Council’s use of the phrase “in present day circumstances,” which alludes to the possibility of circumstances in which strikes could be unnecessary or obsolete. Promotion of “peaceful and reasonable agreement” is clearly the Church’s aim and hope in reference to labor disagreements and strikes.<sup>106</sup>

The rise of machinery brings up another interesting point regarding labor. *Rerum Novarum* explains that work puts the “stamp” of man on matter (art. 8), and article 67 of *Gaudium et Spes* states that Jesus “conferred an eminent dignity on labor when at Nazareth He worked with His own hands.”<sup>107</sup> Von Nell-Breuning explains that

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<sup>105</sup> Alois Grillmeier, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, Volume 5*, edited by Herbert Vorgrimler, et al. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 299.

<sup>106</sup> Alois Grillmeier, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, Volume 5*, edited by Herbert Vorgrimler, et al. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 305.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

computers and advancements in new equipment has created new definitions of labor, however, and that *Gaudium et Spes* addresses both but without clarity. Modern technology has created jobs which involve monitoring a computer for notification of error, for example. In article 68, the Latin text uses the terms *dirigentium* and *operariorum*, which translate into English as “management” and “labor.” Von Nell-Breuning asserts that it is not certain whether *dirigentium* is considered part of labor or not. Yet the Constitution does address multiple kinds of work. “By the words ‘labor’ and ‘workers’ (*labor, operarii*), *Gaudium et Spes* selects various sectors from the whole domain of human work. The reader has to gather from the context which sector is meant in each case.”<sup>108</sup> The actions of the economic manager and the manual laborer under hourly contract are all of concern to the Church.

The tension between the social and individual elements of earthly goods is expounded by von Nell-Breuning. He notes that in the *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas Aquinas accepted individual property (*administration et dispensatio particularis*) but held that the communal nature of goods (*usus communis*) precedes the right to individual property.<sup>109</sup> This is not a statement that implies shame or degradation to those who have individual property. It is not a dualistic or Manichaean statement. However, it is a reminder that when God created the world, He did not create with name tags. Rather He “intended the earth with everything contained in it for the use of all human beings and peoples.”<sup>110</sup> Individual property does not stand alone, but rather promotes order and justice. “The right to property is the technical instrument to make it practicable, that is to

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<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 306.

<sup>109</sup> Alois Grillmeier, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, Volume 5*, edited by Herbert Vorgrimler, et al. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 306.

<sup>110</sup> Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, available online: vatican.va, 69.

say, to regulate it reasonably and peacefully.”<sup>111</sup> Article 69 explains that private property should not solely benefit the owner. Von Nell-Breuning raised this issue further, in consideration also of Pope Pius XI’s teaching on the social nature of property in *Quadragesimo Anno*. He stated that “what is essential to the social function of property, namely that it be used *productively* and so satisfy the needs of other individuals, whether a few, indefinitely many or all, is only expressed by the very general phrase, ‘ut non sibi tantum sed etiam aliis prodesse queant’ (‘accrue to the benefit not only of himself but also of others’) (art. 69).”<sup>112</sup> This raises some important questions. In what manner and to what extent must private property benefit others? Von Nell-Breuning also asks, in consideration of almsgiving as a primary manner of benefitting others, how much almsgiving is mandated. He sees this “distributive aspect” as the only realm of benefitting others addressed by article 69,<sup>113</sup> though it seems that both distributive and relational benefits of property ought to be examined here. If von Nell-Breuning is thinking of a man’s possessions and money as a “lump sum,” then yes, appropriate distribution of money and goods to others is the main question at stake. But if one’s property is examined individually, then there must be different types of communal benefit possible through material possessions other than giving them away.

Regarding the different types of social benefit possible through earthly goods, we must consider the benefit of human thought, striving, and flourishing upon a community. Much like how the lives of those in monasteries and convents benefits others in the active world, one who uses personal possessions in a way that honors God, even privately, is

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<sup>111</sup> Alois Grillmeier, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, Volume 5*, edited by Herbert Vorgrimler, et al. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 306.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 305-306.

using them to the benefit of others. A musical instrument that rarely leaves a person's home is a means by which the person grows as a human being and uses personal gifts from God. Study, physical activity, and art all involve possessions and these may be considered as well. The knowledge and joy that one may receive through one's striving shapes who one is as a Christian and indirectly affects those one meets. On a very practical level, one may also play the music, share the artwork, or demonstrate the physical ability one has worked hard to master for others. These are examples of how private property may benefit other people, even without giving the property away. The impact property has on an individual can shape one's mind and body for the better, which can in turn strengthen those one encounters. The distributive mandate also remains a very important piece of the social nature of property.

In consideration of the distributive mandate that a Christian accepts, specifically almsgiving, von Nell-Breuning addressed the question of one's *superflua*. Moralists, he asserts, have restricted the requirement of only *superflua* being given away—the goods and money that one has that are beyond those needed for a happy, healthy standard of life.<sup>114</sup> With this assertion, a conflict will arise pertaining to the subjective nature of an appropriate standard of life, but this is an appropriate conversation. Another appropriate conversation involves whether persons may maintain more significant wealth if they are using their wealth to provide both employment and positive goods for the public. Von Nell-Breuning states that Pope Pius XI taught this as praiseworthy and acceptable in *Quadragesimo Anno*. This means that it is not a universal standard that *superflua* be

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<sup>114</sup> Alois Grillmeier, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, Volume 5*, edited by Herbert Vorgrimler, et al. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 307.

given away, but implies that the wealthy need to discern how to use *superflua*.<sup>115</sup> Once again we are pointed toward different means by which material goods can be used for social benefit. Almsgiving is one way of demonstrating distributive justice, but it is not the only way that one can uphold the social nature of goods. *Gaudium et Spes* kept its focus on almsgiving, and called Christians to consider contributing more than *superflua*. “The Pastoral Constitution envisages only the distributive aspect, however, and so cannot avoid the duty of giving away. Rather surprisingly it answers it by saying that the Fathers and doctors of the Church had extended the duty even further, teaching that men are obliged to help the poor ‘not merely out of their superfluous goods’”<sup>116</sup> There is no specific mandate regarding when, how many, or in what way goods deemed beyond *superflua* ought to be shared, but in light of the Gospel, this statement packs meaning. It directs a Christian to embrace generosity that goes beyond comfortable giving. The call of a Christian is not to give only what we will not notice is gone, or to ask how little we need to give to be considered generous. Rather, growing in generosity is part of a continuing conversion of heart, which should include discernment and a joy in sharing. Von Nell-Breuning references the mind and heart of a believer when he addresses article 72 in the Constitution, which calls for embracing “the spirit of the beatitudes, notably with a spirit of poverty.” He states:

It is quite understandable that special prominence be given to the beatitude of poverty, because the Christian engaged in the economic domain is particularly exposed to the danger of setting his heart on material things and material success. Consequently he has to take special care to avoid this. He has to strive to possess and use material goods as though he did not possess and use them.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Alois Grillmeier, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, Volume 5*, edited by Herbert Vorgrimler, et al. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 312.

The Council calls for charity rooted in the heart that follows St. Ignatius of Loyola's teachings on detachment from material things. This call is not a condemnation of matter but a decision to not let material things become too important in one's life as though they were desirable for their own sake.

Regarding the final paragraph of article 72, von Nell-Breuning makes an observation about the use of the words "love" and "charity" in English and their nuances in other languages.<sup>118</sup> The French "source document" reads *amour* in both instances. In the Latin text, however, the first reference uses *amor*, while the second reference is *caritas*. He asserts that the terms are not a type of "crescendo... from moral virtue to the theological virtue of charity." Rather, the document is stating that loving one's brethren through economic choices is both an act of justice and an act of charity.<sup>119</sup> While this commentary makes sense, it is also appropriate to recognize the line between economic justice and economic charity. Economic justice may occur in certain instances without strong recognition for the human person. An employer may distribute a just wage, for example, without true concern for the well-being of his employees. Charity includes such a just act, but first and foremost recognizes that justice is due to the individual because of their human dignity and that only good should be desired and sought for the person. The economic teaching of *Gaudium et Spes* demands justice for all, especially those most in need, but all in the name of charity which is commanded by God.

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<sup>118</sup> In English, the final paragraph reads, "Whoever in obedience to Christ seeks first the Kingdom of God, takes therefrom a stronger and purer love for helping all his brethren and for perfecting the work of justice under the inspiration of charity."

<sup>119</sup> Alois Grillmeier, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, Volume 5*, edited by Herbert Vorgrimler, et al. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 313.

## **Pope St. Paul VI – A Call for Development**

In the early aftermath of the Second Vatican Council, it is important to consider the writings of Pope Paul VI, who reconvened the Council in 1963 and approved *Gaudium et Spes* as its sixteenth official document. It was Paul VI who would most significantly impact the extent of the Church's emphasis on social and economic teaching after the Council. His social encyclical, *Populorum Progressio*, is especially worthy of attention. While it was not an earth-rattling document, it was an affirmation of the economic teaching of *Gaudium et Spes* and an opportunity for Paul VI to offer his own wording and emphasis regarding the obligation to see and utilize wealth in a just manner, especially in regard to operations between nations.

When Pope Paul VI embraced leadership of the Second Vatican Council he had a large number of topics and concerns to consider around the globe. Like *Gaudium et Spes*, he could not address every needed topic in detail and had to prioritize. In the spirit of the Constitution, he saw economic issues as a priority to address in his pontificate. While *Humanae Vitae* is arguably his writing that theologians have discussed the most in the last 50 years, other works like *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and *Populorum Progressio* have also received significant attention. *Populorum Progressio*, released in 1967, is strongly connected to the articles on economic justice in *Gaudium et Spes*, and manifests the significance of the economic issues of our age. It extends and expands the thought of the Council and gives a more detailed look at matters that the Constitution called attention to.

Peter Hebblethwaite, biographer of Paul VI, wrote that “*Gaudium et Spes*, so radiant with paschal optimism about the Church's impact on the world, was weak on

economic analysis and had not dispensed with further developments of papal ‘social doctrine’. So the way was prepared for *Populorum Progressio* in 1967.”<sup>120</sup> Whether *Gaudium et Spes* should be considered weak in economic teaching or just so vast that it could not cover everything in detail is a topic for debate. Paul VI held the belief that the world needed a lot of attention and improvement regarding global economics and the use of money and resources. The theme of economic justice in *Populorum Progressio* is development, in particular within third world countries and global situations of poverty. Economic progress, material goods, and education are all elements of development. The word “development” appears 52 times in the encyclical and article 76 is titled, *Development, the New Name for Peace*. Hebblethwaite notes that there was a short time between the promulgation of *Gaudium et Spes* and the release of *Populorum Progressio*—less than 15 months. He also saw the encyclical in a positive fashion, stating, “Previous social encyclicals, including *Mater et Magistra* of Pope John XXIII, had been written from a predominantly ‘European’ point of view, with North Americans included as honorary Europeans. With *Populorum Progressio*, the Church became truly Catholic, universal and planetary.”<sup>121</sup> This is a fitting statement given the new globalization of the twentieth century and the fact that Paul VI was the first pontiff to make extensive use of modern air travel. For the first time, the Holy Father was a man frequently going out to his people around the globe, rather than only receiving guests. Hebblethwaite states that the impulse for writing *Populorum Progressio* came from Paul VI’s visit to India, which took place in December of 1964.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Peter Hebblethwaite, *Paul VI: The First Modern Pope* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 449.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 483.

<sup>122</sup> Peter Hebblethwaite, *Paul VI: The First Modern Pope* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 483.

Regarding the nature of property and ethical use of money, Paul VI was quick to point back to St. Ambrose on the duty of those who have wealth. ““You are not making a gift of what is yours to the poor man, but you are giving him back what is his. You have been appropriating things that are meant to be for the common use of everyone. The earth belongs to everyone, not to the rich.’ These words indicate that the right to private property is not absolute and unconditional.”<sup>123</sup> Paul VI calls individuals to eliminate greed and to see the needs of others as equal to our own needs. He also explains that public authorities may intervene, with the help of other members of the community, when private property is being used in a manner harmful to fundamental needs or the common good.<sup>124</sup> For the Church this never means embracing socialism or communism on the one hand, nor a laissez faire mentality on the other. Freedom and moral limits must both be honored.

After Paul VI affirmed the Council’s acceptance of the expropriation of land in certain cases, he expanded on a strong moral point regarding those who seek to gain income. Income cannot be sought as an end in itself nor with a primarily selfish motive. Other people must be part of financial decisions. He wrote:

(Vatican II) clearly teaches that income thus derived is not for man’s capricious use, and that the exclusive pursuit of personal gain is prohibited. Consequently, it is not permissible for citizens who have garnered sizable income from the resources and activities of their own nation to deposit a large portion of their income in foreign countries for the sake of their own private gain alone.<sup>125</sup>

To western culture, it may seem like a radical idea that it is morally problematic to seek income solely for personal gain. But once again, the Church is not rejecting the

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<sup>123</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio (PP)*, Encyclical on the Development of Peoples (1967), 23.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio (PP)*, Encyclical on the Development of Peoples (1967), 24.

attainment of wealth. It is rejecting a mentality that fails to have a bigger plan for wealth other than one's own personal pleasures. Having wealth does not negate an individual's potential for sainthood. Yet the greater the generosity, the greater the saint. The greater the detachment from wealth, the greater the saint. Paul VI affirms the teachings of *Gaudium et Spes* in *Populorum Progressio* and calls Christians to an altruistic view of wealth and a more serious love of neighbor. This battle against avarice is the call of individuals and also of nations.

Paul VI proclaimed:

The superfluous goods of wealthier nations ought to be placed at the disposal of poorer nations. The rule, by virtue of which in times past those nearest us were to be helped in time of need, applies today to all the needy throughout the world. And the prospering peoples will be the first to benefit from this. Continuing avarice on their part will arouse the judgment of God and the wrath of the poor, with consequences no one can foresee.<sup>126</sup>

Here the Holy Father's mention of *superflua* applies especially to civil leaders who have the authority to govern the wealth of a nation. The globalization of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is also noteworthy in his statement, as he proclaimed that we are not only to consider those that live near us but rather those in need anywhere. The strength of Paul VI's conviction can be clearly seen as well, as he provides a warning for wealthy nations who only place effort into their own gain.

Peter Hebblethwaite explained a development in Paul VI's perspective rooted in his economic and social thought. In 1971 Paul VI wrote *Octogesima Adveniens*, in recognition of the 80 years that has passed since Pope Leo XIII released *Rerum Novarum*. Hebblethwaite considers the letter less authoritative and modest.<sup>127</sup> Yet it was not a lessened conviction of Paul VI but rather an acknowledgement of complexity that he

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<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>127</sup> Peter Hebblethwaite, *Paul VI: The First Modern Pope* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 577.

sees. Hebblethwaite quotes *Octogesima Adveniens*: “In view of the varied situations in the world, it is difficult to give one teaching to cover them all or to offer a solution which has universal value.”<sup>128</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* was opening the door further on economic teachings. *Populorum Progressio* expanded on these teachings and applied them more universally. Yet Hebblethwaite sees a maturation in Paul VI’s understanding: “So *Populorum Progressio* was on the right lines. The next development in Catholic social doctrine would consist not in repeating but in applying it... The task (of Christian communities) is to diagnose their own situations in the critical light of the Gospel.”<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, quoting *Octogesima Adveniens*, 4.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 578.

## Pastoral Letter of the American Bishops

While Pope Paul VI had an impact on both the United States and the universal Church, the United States bishops had the task of analyzing and responding to local economic issues. Their collective voice tried to form an American conscience on social and economic justice. The bishops' pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All* affirmed *Gaudium et Spes* and called residents of the United States, many of whom lived with a surplus of wealth, to recognize the duty that having wealth renders—namely, to share considerably with the poor. The letter also mentions tithing in one instance but missed an opportunity to more thoroughly explain the biblical root of tithing and its practical potential.

In the years after the Second Vatican Council, the American bishops shifted their emphasis from the focus on doctrine and catechesis that had been of central importance in the early twentieth century.

Dramatic and symbolic activities, publications, official ecclesiastical statements, and papal visits focused on Catholic responsibilities to seek peace and justice in the world. Of the 188 official public statements, resolutions, and pastoral letters of the American hierarchy between 1966 and 1988, for example, 52 percent were addressed to issues of national and international social justice. In contrast, only 12 percent focused on sexual morality and abortion. The remainder concentrated directly on internal ecclesiastical issues.<sup>130</sup>

The year after the Extraordinary Synod of 1985, the American bishops issued a letter addressing the economic situation of the country. In November of 1986, *Economic Justice for All* was released. Aiming to break down the “tragic separation” that Catholics in the United States often witness between faith and everyday life, the document had a

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<sup>130</sup> Patrick Carey, *Catholics in America: A History Updated Edition*, (New York: Sheed & Ward, 2009), 124.

tone not unlike the renowned first line of *Gaudium et Spes*. It noted that economic activity in the country can feed both our families and our anxieties and both exercise our talents or waste them.<sup>131</sup> The letter is an application of teachings of *Gaudium et Spes* as it sought to apply them to the modern situation of the United States. It recognized the status of the country as an “economic giant.”<sup>132</sup> While the wealth the nation has attained is not intrinsically evil, it states that “the great wealth of the United States can easily blind us to the poverty that exists in this nation and the destitution of hundreds of millions of people in other parts of the world.”<sup>133</sup> The letter calls Catholics to renewed values and deeper conversion in economic perspective. It has a significant focus on businesses and economic relationships but without promoting a single ideology or political perspective, as the Church is never bound to a single economic system.<sup>134</sup> The heart of the letter concentrates on “big picture” issues in the United States: unemployment, poverty, agriculture, and the relationship of the United States and developing countries. In line with *Gaudium et Spes*, the pastoral letter upholds the protection of human dignity as the central element of ethical economic decisions. It also states that human dignity can only be protected in community and that everyone has a special duty to serve the poor and weak. “Those with the greatest needs require the greatest response.”<sup>135</sup> While these matters concern governments and businesses and the many decisions they make that affect other people, the personal actions of Christians are addressed in various sections.

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<sup>131</sup> *Economic Justice for All*, Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy, National Conference of Catholic Bishops (Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1986), vi-vii.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>133</sup> *Economic Justice for All*, Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy, National Conference of Catholic Bishops (Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1986), 38.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, vii, 66.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, ix-xi.

The bishops were still concerned about the country's mentality toward private property and the economic mindsets of individuals.

In the introduction, the letter asks, "How do my economic choices contribute to the strength of my family and community, the values of my children, to a sensitivity to those in need? In consumer society, how can I develop a healthy detachment from things?"<sup>136</sup> The answer to these questions is, in part, an answer similar to the ethics of *Gaudium et Spes* and *Populorum Progressio*, though with recognition that the United States has more to give than to receive. After quoting from article 69 of *Gaudium et Spes* regarding helping the poor with more than only superfluous goods, it states, "If persons are to be recognized as members of the human community, then the community has an obligation to help fulfill these basic needs unless an absolute scarcity of resources makes this strictly impossible. No such scarcity exists in the United States today."<sup>137</sup> This last line, as brief as it may be, is a wake up call for citizens of the United States. There are citizens in all different economic situations in the country and this in itself is acceptable. In a free market there is going to be disparity in wealth and ownership. Some even argue for the goodness of disparity, claiming that inequality "may be considered desirable for economic and social reasons, such as the need for incentives and the provision of greater rewards for greater risks."<sup>138</sup> Yet there is such a surplus of goods present within the borders of the United States that assisting those in dire need from other countries is a clear duty. The United States cannot fix or give to every good cause, but it can make a significant difference.

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<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

<sup>137</sup> *Economic Justice for All*, Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy, National Conference of Catholic Bishops (Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1986), 36.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

On the ownership of private property, *Economic Justice for All* reiterates messages of *Gaudium et Spes* and *Populorum Progressio* but with its own emphases and in a manner pertinent to first world capitalism. It does not shy away from very directly defending the right to private property, which helps put concerns about communism to rest. It states, “The Catholic tradition has long defended the right to private ownership of productive property. This right is an important element in a just economic policy.”<sup>139</sup> It is quick to note the limits on ownership, however, and that duties toward others must be at the forefront of economic action. “Support of private ownership does not mean that anyone has the right to unlimited accumulation of wealth... No one is justified in keeping for his exclusive use what he does not need, when others lack necessities.”<sup>140</sup> When these assertions are juxtaposed the balance of rights and duties in Catholic social teaching can be clearly seen. Freedom must be defended, “but (the Church) also rejects the notion that a free market automatically produces justice.”<sup>141</sup> Both governments and citizens have responsibilities in the work of justice. Governments must protect human rights and assure an appropriate base level of living for all people in their jurisdiction. All citizens must do their part to be in line with these governmental actions and work to improve the lives of the poor, vulnerable, and the unemployed.<sup>142</sup> Carrying out the works of the Gospel begins with interior conversion.

*Economic Justice for All* indirectly articulates that working toward justice includes elements of philosophy and ideology, but that it is ultimately rooted in concrete

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<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>140</sup> *Economic Justice for All*, Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy, National Conference of Catholic Bishops (Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1986), 58.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-61.

decisions. Toward the end, the pastoral letter makes several statements to assist individuals with conscience formation and to guide their actions:

Renouncing self-centered desires, bearing one's daily cross, and imitating Christ's compassion, all involve a personal struggle to control greed and selfishness, a personal commitment to reverence one's own human dignity and the dignity of others by avoiding self-indulgence and those attachments that make us insensitive to the conditions of others and that erode social solidarity.<sup>143</sup>

The document also calls families to control unnecessary wants, combat a throw-away culture, and discern whether we are called to greater simplicity.<sup>144</sup> Finally, it sees tithing in terms of distributive justice. It notes that sacrificial giving of those in communion with the Church is needed to pay salaries of religious and lay workers and also to bolster the works of the Church. "The obligation to sustain the Church's institutions—education and health care, social service agencies, religious education programs, care of the elderly, youth ministry, and the like—falls on all the members of the community because of their baptism."<sup>145</sup> The potency of tithing and generous giving are real, though unfortunately tithing appears rare today. *Economic Justice for All* reminds us that this power begins with the self-reflection and free will of each person.

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<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 167-168.

<sup>145</sup> *Economic Justice for All*, Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy, National Conference of Catholic Bishops (Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1986), 175.

## Theological Critiques of Cardinal Avery Dulles and J. Brian Benestad

In the four decades after the Council, messages pertaining to economic and social justice became more common in the United States. Post-Conciliar American Catholic theologians have continued to focus on social justice issues and on the ethical principles of *Guadium et Spes*, and at times have offered critiques of some American Catholic excessive preoccupations with social justice. Among those many theologians, the works of Cardinal Avery Dulles and J. Brian Benestad serve to illustrate one kind of theological response to social justice issues in the United States. Dulles and Benestad represent a theological critique of a post-conciliar overemphasis on social justice; not a critique of the principles of *Guadium et Spes*, which they accept

Cardinal Avery Dulles (1918-2008) was thoughtful and humble in his work in many areas of theology. Dulles was born in New York and was raised in a Presbyterian family. He converted to Catholicism in 1940 and later became a lieutenant in the United States Navy. The Society of Jesus became his religious community in 1946, and this decision carried the potential of conflict with his immediate family. He wrote his mother a letter in which he asked for her “patient acceptance of my action, since you know that I would not do it unless I were convinced that it is best for my own sanctification and the service of God.”<sup>146</sup> The voice and pen of Father Dulles would be widely regarded into the twentieth century, and he was recognized for his work and fidelity in a special way when Pope John Paul II appointed him a cardinal in 2001.<sup>147</sup> A humble Christian

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<sup>146</sup> Patrick Carey, *Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., A Model Theologian, 1918-2008*, chps. 13-14 (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2010), 95.

<sup>147</sup> For a thorough examination of all stages of the life of Cardinal Avery Dulles, reference *Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., A Model Theologian*, by Patrick W. Carey, Paulist Press, 2010.

theologian, Cardinal Dulles went through the Second Vatican Council and its aftermath, addressing scores of topics along the way.

In the 1970s Cardinal Dulles raised a different kind of perspective on Church involvement in social matters. In a time when cries of peace and justice were becoming more common in the United States, and in a manner which was sometimes severed from Catholic belief, Dulles preferred to focus on the core aspects of the Faith. Nine years after the closing of the Second Vatican Council, Dulles was asked to research a number of topics, including church-state relations. When some Jesuits hoped to have a central focus on peace and justice, Dulles objected. “He was not opposed to such suggestions, but he did not believe ‘that the Church is a particularly effective agent of social reform, or that social reform ought to be pursued by the Church as such.’ He preferred that the center [i.e., the Jesuit Woodstock Theological Center] ‘focus on problems more evidently connected with Christian revelation and with the mission of the Church to preach and interpret the revelation and to become a worshipping community.’”<sup>148</sup> Dulles was a faithful servant of the Second Vatican Council, but this quote is one example of his ability to weigh the times in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council. He clearly desired both peace and justice, but also saw that working for peace and justice apart from faith in Christ, worship of Christ, and teaching others about Christ would be the Church falling short of its mission and the Gospel. The example of Dulles raises important points and questions about *Gaudium et Spes*.

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<sup>148</sup> Patrick Carey, *Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., A Model Theologian, 1918-2008*, chps. 13-14 (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2010), 275.

The economic social teaching of *Gaudium et Spes* and the works of popes and bishops such as *Populorum Progressio* and *Economic Justice for All*, clearly call Christians to the principle of participation in society which is intended to bring positive change to the world. It is important to recognize, however, that neither the Gospel nor Church doctrine can be reduced to writings about social change or select virtues, and that was Dulles's point. In reading *Dei Verbum*, we understand that the Scriptures must be read as a whole, and by no means does the heart of the Scriptures center itself on social change. The Church does not exist for social reform or for economic progress. If this were the case, the Church could be reduced to a type of secular government. The Church exists for the sanctification and salvation of souls, and because the mind, body, and soul are linked so closely, actions which cause social or economic oppression are important to those in communion with the Church. The example of Cardinal Dulles and the modern popes have shown us that Christians are not mere social or economic activists, but that did not mean they were negating the seriousness of modern problems in the social or economic realms.

The balance of orthodoxy and orthopraxis, or the balance between faith in Christ and works of justice, is further expounded by Dulles in his foreword to a book by Dr. J. Brian Benestad. Dr. Benestad wrote, *The Pursuit of a Just Social Order*, in 1982. The topics in his work are strongly connected to the Second Vatican Council and to *Gaudium et Spes* in particular. In the foreword, Dulles praises Benestad's voice as one worth serious thought and consideration.<sup>149</sup> Benestad did not write the book solely as an informative piece. Dulles notes that in his work he offers criticism of the manner in

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<sup>149</sup> J. Brian Benestad, *Pursuit of a Just Social Order: Policy Statements of the U. S. Catholic Bishops, 1966-80* (Washington DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1982), xiv.

which bishops address social matters. His critiques include: 1-The bishops “lack sufficient expertise to speak with authority about many of the questions addressed.” These questions include those pertaining to economic matters. 2-The bishops “can hardly avoid introducing their own political and economic biases, which should on no account be confused with the teaching of the Church.” 3-On matters of legitimate debate, “the bishops tend to marginalize church members who have different social or political orientations.” 4-“By seeking relevance for the Church on terms set by secular trends, the bishops unwittingly give support to the opinion that evangelization, prayer, worship, and religious doctrine are of secondary importance.”<sup>150</sup> Dulles continues by explaining that Benestad is not in opposition to Church statements about social matters, nor Church influence. Dulles clarifies that Benestad may actually be characterized “as calling for an increase of the Church’s social and political order without any reduction of the importance of personal religious practice.”<sup>151</sup> Dulles’s own life stands as a witness of such balance. Relationship with Christ was central to the life of Cardinal Dulles, and because of this he cared about doctrinal and ethical issues and controversies. Dulles paraphrases Benestad’s thought on social change in explaining that “no transformation of social structures... will be of lasting value unless it is accompanied by the personal conversion of individuals to the way of the Gospel.”<sup>152</sup> In line with the thought of Pope John Paul II, Dulles included another noteworthy summary of Benestad’s thought:

Unconsciously infected by contemporary trends, the American bishops, according to Benestad, have tended to underemphasize the importance of personal faith, character formation, and discipleship. Insufficiently familiar with the great tradition of Catholic political thought, they have failed to pass on the patrimony of social and political wisdom

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<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, x-xi.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>152</sup> J. Brian Benestad, *Pursuit of a Just Social Order: Policy Statements of the U. S. Catholic Bishops, 1966-80* (Washington DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1982), xi-xii.

to which they are the rightful heirs. For this reason they have in many cases used policy statements as a substitute for social teaching, and neglected to give a coherent rationale for the policies they have advocated. Too often the cardinals and bishops have descended to the level of lobbyists rather than presenting themselves as authentic spiritual leaders.<sup>153</sup>

While Dulles does not grant a universal endorsement to every word of Benestad's book in his foreword, his willingness to write the foreword and his high regard for Benestad's thought manifest that they have similar thoughts on application of the social and economic teachings of *Gaudium et Spes* and other social works of the Church. Their voices are important for leaders in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to take to heart so that we avoid separating the branches of justice from the vine from which they originate.

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<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

## Conclusion

After spending decades working against the Communist regime in Poland, Pope St. John Paul II witnessed the fall of the Eastern Bloc. When he returned to his home country he did not solely celebrate the great victory, however. John Paul II offered a message of caution about the dangers of materialism. His wisdom helps remind us that the Church stands somewhere between Communism and laissez-faire capitalism when it comes to economics and also that the lure of material objects is a constant danger in our world. Many people in developed countries are obsessed with money and possessions. An increase in technology and materialism have been consistent with a drop of religious practice in America in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council. “Weekly attendance at Mass... was down from 71 percent in 1963 to 52 percent in 1971,”<sup>154</sup> and hovered around 35 percent in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>155</sup> Even for those who do regularly worship, a wealth-centered mindset has carried some individuals to the point that they struggle to make even modest donations to charities, the poor, or the Church. With this mindset, small donations look like big sacrifices and any giving of any amount of money is perceived as a serious decision. For an individual or a family in true financial distress it must be acknowledged that *superflua* may not exist and charitable giving may be a serious challenge. Yet for the middle class, upper-middle class, and the outright wealthy, this is not so. Tithing is a minor sacrifice, but the financial state of most parishes manifests that charitable giving is not universally happening at a high level, and personal finances are sometimes given an irrational amount of attention in America.

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<sup>154</sup> Patrick Carey, *Catholics in America: A History Updated Edition*, (New York: Sheed & Ward, 2009), 119.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

There are European countries that utilize a form of religious taxation which brings in a significant amount of revenue. In Germany, for example, the *Kirchensteuer* is imposed on taxpayers who are church members. This “church tax” is explained by the German Conference of Bishops as a tax based upon typical assessments of taxation. “The basis for calculation of the Church tax in Germany is the state wage and income tax.”<sup>156</sup> Such a concept is foreign to American life, but the German bishops explain that the *Kirchensteuer* is just as it follows standard protocol. “In practice this means that only those Church members pay Church tax who are in the position for this based on their economic capability.”<sup>157</sup> While a fair formula may exist for the numeric specifics of the *Kirchensteuer*, it raises questions regarding the nature of charitable giving and freedom, as well as the most just relationship between church and state. It also raises the question of whether the *Kirchensteuer* is another excuse for a German taxpayer to not declare a religious affiliation in a country and a part of the world already witnessing lower and lower participation in Church life. The freedom to give or to tithe is a basic element of charitable giving to the Church and to the poor. Religious taxation is something that needs to be assessed carefully in each country that still has such a system, as it may be a cause of more harm than good.

Economic and charitable failures in the modern day are in part caused by a loss of the sense of the communal nature of money and goods that articles 67-72 of *Gaudium et*

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<sup>156</sup> Deutsche Bischofskonferenz, *Kirchensteuer*, Ist die Kirchensteuer gerecht? Available online: <https://dbk.de/themen/kirche-und-geld/kirchensteuer/>  
German text: Basis für die Berechnung der Kirchensteuer ist in Deutschland die staatliche Lohn- und Einkommensteuer.

<sup>157</sup> Deutsche Bischofskonferenz, *Kirchensteuer*, Ist die Kirchensteuer gerecht? Available online: <https://dbk.de/themen/kirche-und-geld/kirchensteuer/>  
German text: In der Praxis bedeutet dies, dass nur diejenigen Kirchenmitglieder Kirchensteuer zahlen, die hierzu aufgrund ihrer wirtschaftlichen Leistungsfähigkeit in der Lage sind.

*Spes* addressed. At the same time, the Church accepts the existence of private property and the action of striving for economic successes which render increased profits. With this juxtaposition, a conflict should arise regarding how much is “enough”. How much money is “enough” for one to keep for his or her family and for the future? How much is “enough” to sacrifice and to give away? For a Christian who sees the communal meaning of goods, this is a healthy tension. The tension should include ongoing discernment and some struggle. A Christian should never consider himself as having perfected his detachment from material things or his following of the teachings of the Gospel and *Gaudium et Spes*. Discernment and generosity are greatly needed in our world with tithing as a core, biblical consideration.

Yet the trend in developed countries is an increasingly individualized view of money and possessions and a lack of understanding that even private property does not exist for a single person’s pleasure alone. Some who have wealth become irrational over a scratch on their car, demand money back when a meal isn’t prepared correctly, or struggle with the thought of donating twenty dollars to a charity. Driving a simpler vehicle, skipping a destination vacation for a year, or giving up satellite television can counter the individualism of first-world countries. Articles 67-72 of *Gaudium et Spes* teach that such individualistic and consumerist attitudes need conversion.

Giving away money and material goods needs to be a priority and a joyful opportunity for Christians, rather than a tremendous burden. Keeping the plight of brothers and sisters in situations far more difficult than our own will help us see ourselves closer to the way that God sees us. Yet we also need to be taught about the nature and purpose of material goods and ethical economic practices. We need the teachings of the

Church to be applied to modern situations in the world. We need the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes* and the writings of the theologians, popes, and bishops who have affirmed those teachings. They remind us that our goods and money are not ours to hoard. We also need more direct writing and preaching about the spiritual and practical power of tithing, which would bolster the social messages of the Council and its aftermath. Christians are called to embody these teachings and strive for simplicity with possessions, while not denying the freedom and joy that proper use of material goods can render.

Since a communal approach to private property is a foreign mindset for many today, especially in developed countries, we need more effective teaching on the social principles of *Gaudium et Spes* and a new emphasis on conversion of the heart. This understanding will still honor individual freedom and individual striving. It will not threaten peoples' dreams but will instead liberate people from the weight of materialistic obsession, and joy will result when Christians can live their vocations with freedom and charity.

Οὐδείς δύναται δυσὶ κυρίοις δουλεύειν· ἢ γὰρ τὸν ἓνα μισήσει καὶ τὸν ἕτερον ἀγαπήσει, ἢ ἐνὸς ἀνθέξεται καὶ τοῦ ἑτέρου καταφρονήσει. οὐ δύνασθε θεῷ δουλεύειν καὶ μαμωνᾷ.

*No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. – Matthew 6:24*

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