

“An Echo in their Hearts”: The Church in Our Modern World¹

by Kristin E. Heyer

A month before opening the Second Vatican Council Pope John XXIII broadcast an address to the world, expressing his hope that in response to the needs of the underdeveloped countries, the church “wishes to be the Church of all, and especially the Church of the poor.”² Just over fifty years later during his first week as pope, Pope Francis echoed, “How I would like a Church which is poor and for the poor.”³ The world has witnessed many examples of the new pontiff’s commitment to the poor in word and deed. I would like to recall one example in particular that reflects my focus herein: During his first official trip outside Rome since his election that March, Pope Francis celebrated mass on Lampedusa, an Italian island that has become a safe haven for African migrants seeking passage to Europe. He chose this site after the suffering of migrants who had recently died at sea while attempting to cross from North Africa revisited him like “a thorn in the heart.”⁴

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Prior to making any public statement, Pope Francis made the sign of the cross and tossed a wreath of white and yellow flowers into the sea, commemorating the estimated twenty thousand African immigrants who have died over the past twenty-five years trying to reach a new life in Europe (another three hundred went missing there in February 2013, fleeing conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Mali).⁵ The pope celebrated Mass within sight of the “graveyard of wrecks,” where fishing boats carrying migrants and asylum seekers end up after they drift ashore.⁶ Other reminders that Lampedusa is synonymous with dangerous attempts to reach Europe abounded: “the altar was built over a small boat”; the pastoral staff, the lectern and even the chalice were carved from the wood of shipwrecked boats.⁷ He lamented in his homily our disorientation in sin and indifference to the plight of these vulnerable brothers and sisters: recalling immemorial temptations to power and its consequences,

1 This essay was first presented at the University of Notre Dame’s “Joy and Hope: Celebrating 50 Years since *Gaudium et Spes*” conference on March 21, 2015. Portions are adapted from “Building a Just World: Resources from Vatican II” (with Bryan Massingale), in *Beyond Vatican II: Charting a Catholic Future*, ed. Paul G. Crowley (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 2014).

2 John XXIII, radio message, September 11, 1962, AAS 54 (1962): 682.

3 Francis, audience to representatives of the communications media, “Address of the Holy Father Pope Francis,” March 16, 2013, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/march/documents/papa-francesco_20130316_rappresentanti-media.html.

4 Francis, homily on visit to Lampedusa, July 8 2013, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130708_omelia-lampedusa.html.

5 Cindy Wooden, “Pope Calls for Repentance over Treatment of Migrants,” *Catholic News Service*, July 8, 2013, <http://www.catholicnews.com/services/englishnews/2013/pope-calls-for-repentance-over-treatment-of-migrants.cfm>.

6 John Hooper, “Pope Francis Condemns Global Indifference to Suffering,” *The Guardian*, July 8, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/08/pope-francis-condemns-indifference-suffering>.

7 Wooden, “Pope Calls for Repentance.”

“Adam where are you?” and then “Cain, where is your brother?” These are questions addressed to each of us, “How many times do those who seek [a better place for their families] not find understanding, . . . not find welcome, . . . not find solidarity!” He concluded petitioning the Lord for the grace to weep over our indifference, to weep over the cruelty in the world, in ourselves, and even in those who anonymously make socioeconomic decisions that open the way to tragedies like this.

There in the southern Mediterranean Pope Francis shared in the grief and anguish marking one of the key signs of our times—forced migration—moved by the humanity of the Eritreans he met and provoked by the inhumanity of those numb to their plight. *Gaudium et Spes* similarly engages the church and world in reflection on what it means to be human—flawed and fragile yet called to share in divine life, and bound in solidarity. Given its theological anthropology and ecclesiological charge, living out the call of *Gaudium et Spes* at least demands Christians appreciate that “Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in our hearts,” indeed sometimes a thorn in our hearts. Here I present some of the key themes and legacies of *Gaudium et Spes* in light of this focus, and then return to several elements of its “echo” in areas of dialogue, conscience, and resonance for the church today.

Legacies of *Gaudium et Spes*: a Public Church

As historian John O’Malley aptly puts it, the spirit of Vatican II was marked by shifts that signaled a different way of being church: from “commands to invitations, from coercion to conscience, from monologue to dialogue, from ruling to serving, from exclusion to inclusion, from hostility to friendship, and from behavior-modification to inner appropriation of values.”⁸ It is fair to say that the substance and tone of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World exemplifies this transformation. The council’s articulation of its social mission in solidarity with all of humankind in this, its final and longest document (promulgated on December 7, 1965, the last day of the council), marks a dramatic departure from the church’s traditionally defensive, reactionary stance toward the world. *Gaudium et Spes* ushers in an open stance that takes seriously the struggles of those “in any way afflicted.”

Among the council’s four constitutions, two focus on the church itself: *Lumen Gentium* looks inward, to the renewal of the church’s self-understanding and structures, and *Gaudium et Spes* addresses the relationship between church and contemporary world in all its pluralism and complexity. In the latter we encounter the council’s shift away from conceiving of church and world (or the sacred and secular realms) in opposition to each other, and toward engaging social questions as central to the church’s very mission and identity. This dialogical style signaled a clear departure from the defensive siege mentality the church adopted following the felt impact of movements of modern society and culture deemed threatening to the church: the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, the rise of liberal democracies.

With the wealthy European elites seen to be the church’s allies, the pre-Vatican II church denounced human rights, labor unions, and religious toleration as dangerous. Whereas the council “did not want to change the church into a democracy,” it did “redefine how authority was to function, for instance, with a respect for conscience that transformed the members of the church from ‘subjects’ into ‘participants.’”⁹ Whereas the church would remain privileged teacher of the gospel, the council “insisted that like all good teachers, [the church] needed to learn as it taught.”

8 John O’Malley, “The Council’s Spirit: Vatican II: The Time for Reconciliation,” *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education* 42 (Fall 2012): 6.

9 John O’Malley, “The Style of Vatican II,” *America*, February 24, 2003, <http://americamagazine.org/issue/423/article/style-vatican-ii>.

The initial lines of *Gaudium et Spes* signal these major changes in posture, mission and methodology:

The joys and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community of people united in age towards the Father's kingdom, bearers of a message of salvation for all of humanity. That is why they cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history.¹⁰

Gaudium et Spes thus puts into the forefront its call for dialogue with the world and an examination of social, cultural, and political realities in the light of the gospel. No other Vatican decree is addressed so explicitly to the wider Christian community and people outside the church, noting in paragraph three, "The Council can provide no more eloquent proof of its solidarity with the entire human family with which it is bound up, as well as its respect and love for that family, than by engaging with it in conversation about these various problems."

Thus the church's social teaching becomes bolstered with ecclesiological grounding; no longer was its social teaching considered only as a narrow category within moral theology, but rather a means of fulfilling the church's very mission.¹¹ In *Gaudium et Spes* the council urges Christians, as "citizens of two cities," to attend to earthly duties in light of the spirit of the gospel. The document grants the ambivalent nature of worldly concerns, yet warns against total rejection of worldly activity as a substitute for discernment and selective engagement. It condemns an attitude of otherworldliness that deemphasizes earthly duties on the view that our only abiding city is that which is to come.¹² The document calls the church to political engagement to protect human dignity, without conflating the Catholic faith with particular political systems. While this indirect role for the church's engagement in the political order entails endless distinctions and decisions, the effort must be made precisely because the alternatives to an indirect engagement are equally unacceptable: a politicized church or a church in retreat from human affairs. The first erodes the transcendence of the gospel; the second betrays the incarnational dimension of Christian faith. I was struck that several of the tributes to Richard McBrien after his death recalled his emphasis on a similar eschatologically informed ecclesiology that tempers the perennial Catholic temptation to triumphalism: he insisted, "the church is not the reign of God. It is 'the seed and beginning' of that reign, and always at its service."¹³

The council's shift away from suspicion of worldly engagement rests upon on its understanding of the human person as the bond between the church and the world. The council affirms the church's duty to safeguard human dignity, promote human rights, and cultivate the unity of the human family.¹⁴ By the later sessions of the council, concern had shifted to justice throughout the world and the social questions taken up became more global in scope. This marked a significant move beyond the European-dominated concerns of the pre-Vatican II church. For example, in *Gaudium et Spes*, the council makes clear the interrelated nature of questions of international economics and peace.¹⁵ With the proliferation of new kinds of weapons the council recommends a fresh scrutiny of longstanding just war teachings given new threats to civilians and the harms posed by the arms race. It emphasizes

10 See *Gaudium et Spes*, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

11 Richard McBrien, "Catholic Social Action," *National Catholic Reporter*, March 3, 1978, 7–8, as cited in Timothy G. McCarthy, *The Catholic Tradition: The Church in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 1998), 260.

12 *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 43.

13 Edward P. Hannenberg quotes McBrien in "History and Mystery: Two Themes That Guided the Late Father Richard McBrien," *National Catholic Reporter*, January 28, 2015. <http://ncronline.org/news/people/history-and-mystery-two-themes-guided-late-fr-richard-mcbrrien>.

14 *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 40–42.

15 Judith A. Merkle, SNDdeN, *From the Heart of the Church: The Catholic Social Tradition* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 120.

the detrimental impact of the commodification of labor, and insists the right to private property must yield to the cry of the poor in light of the common purpose of the goods of creation.¹⁶

Many have noted the document's torturous development, from its origins in spontaneous interventions from the council floor through numerous drafts and thousands of amendments. Expressing his encouragement for its development and the urgency of addressing the church's mission *ad extra*, the Brazilian archbishop Dom Helder Camara asked, "Are we to spend our whole time discussing internal church problems while two-thirds of human kind is dying of hunger?"¹⁷ Some found it too Western, too European, too optimistic; along the way significant disagreements reflected tensions between more Augustinian and more Thomistic perspectives on the world and its redemption. In the final session one bishop described it as the "Magna Carta of modern paganism" while another called it the "Magna Carta for humanity today."¹⁸ In the end, both theological traditions can be found in the constitution, although the more Thomistic perspective granting the limited but still positive potential of humans and society predominates.

Thus the legacy of Vatican II regarding the church's social mission is one of freedom, transcendence, and independence for the church from political systems but also one of legitimate engagement with the world.¹⁹ Whereas the particular challenges of negotiating how and when the church should involve itself while remaining independent are matters for ongoing discernment in the Christian community, the post-Vatican II church has joined its personal and sacramental ministry to a social and public presence, thereby legitimizing a "public church" on the whole.

Nothing That Is Truly Human Fails to Resonate with Christian Concern

In method and substance, *Gaudium et Spes* places the human condition at the center of its reflections: "It is the human person, therefore, which is key to this discussion, each individual human person in her or his totality, body and soul, heart and conscience, mind and will" (no. 3). Employing biblical and personalist language the council invites all people of good will to collaborate to create social conditions consonant with the dignity of every person.²⁰ Rooted in accounts of creation and incarnation, the heart of *Gaudium et Spes* takes up what constitutes the truly human—loved into being by God and made for relationship yet caught in sin—presenting a dynamic vision of the person that stresses authentic freedom. God's revelation in Christ is the central norm for what it means to be human: "it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of humanity truly becomes clear" (no. 22). Walter Kasper highlights three elements of the relationship between Christology and anthropology here: "As an affirmation of everything that is right, true, good and lovely about human beings; as a prophetic criticism of all forms of alienation in human beings; and finally as the creative surpassing of everything that is possible in purely human terms, and thus as the completion and fulfillment of human beings in God."²¹

This personalism grounds the connections the document forges between the church and the world, the origins and development of culture, its covenantal portrayal of marriage that emphasizes conjugal love, and its provisions for conscientious objection as an alternative to the just war tradition. Whereas Pope John XXIII in his 1963 encyclical *Pacem in terris* had moved the church from "opposition to modern rights and freedoms to active engagement in

16 Merkle, *From the Heart*, 121.

17 Richard Gallardetz and Catherine E. Clifford, *Keys to the Council: Unlocking the Teaching of Vatican II* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2012), 90.

18 Norman P. Tanner, *The Church and the World: Gaudium et Spes, Inter Mirifica* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2005), 14.

19 As Edward Schillebeeckx has suggested, this commitment to engagement to the world was the most lasting and significant change of the council. In his words, the implication was that there was to be "no salvation outside the world." See Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 5.

20 Christine Firer Hinze, "Straining toward Solidarity in a Suffering World: *Gaudium et Spes* 'After Forty Years,'" in *Vatican II: Forty Years Later*, ed. William Madges, College Theology Society Annual Volume 51, 2005 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 167.

21 Cited in Hinze, "Straining toward Solidarity," 171.

the global struggle for human rights,” the council develops the church’s approach to human rights further, spelling out at length the universal rights and duties that flow from the dignity of having been created in the divine image and places them within the context of human interdependence.²² Hence the council’s integration of explicitly scriptural and theological arguments with appeals based on natural law evidenced its confidence that “a Christian humanism is possible—a hope that one can articulate a vision that is both faithfully Christian and also intelligible to those outside the Christian community.”²³ A hope that nothing that is genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. I would like to elaborate three dimensions of this echo: its condition upon deep and wide listening; its manifestation in the sanctuary of conscience; and its reverberations that summon the church today.

Deep Listening and Dialogue: To Detect Echoes of the Truly Human

First, in order to have “all that is truly human [echo] in our hearts,” it is imperative that the church genuinely listen, seeking voices welcome and dissonant, from far corners of the world, lay and ordained, insiders and outsiders. The dialogue invited and legitimated by *Gaudium et Spes* offers a crucial avenue to its ongoing witness in service of human dignity.

Engaging the “signs of the times” and seeking to detect the meaning of emerging history, while at the same time sharing the aspirations of all those who want to build a more human world: this is the dialogical charge issued in *Gaudium et Spes*. This emphasis recurs throughout the pastoral constitution, reflecting a methodological shift from a classicist to a historically conscious approach.²⁴ Catholic engagement with the world and its transformation by the penetration of gospel values should be marked by a spirit of dialogue and service and by what some have called a “confident modesty,” mindful that the church both teaches and learns from the world.²⁵ It is not insignificant, then, that theologians who had been previously banned were invited to the council and bishops and theologians were learning from each other there, exemplifying to some degree this spirit of reciprocity and humility. In the language of the document, laity are explicitly empowered to be active participants in such dialogue: “Let the [laity] not imagine that [their] pastors are always such experts that to every problem which arises, however complicated, they can give him a concrete solution, or event that such is their mission. . . . Let the laity take their distinctive role” (no. 43).

The dialogical engagement with wider society central to *Gaudium et Spes* is evident in theological, pastoral, and social movements in subsequent decades across the globe—from liberation and feminist theologies to renewed commitments to justice on the part of Catholic educational institutions and Catholic involvement in the civil rights movement. The US bishops’ conference engaged political and economic concerns in consultation with lay experts with their landmark pastoral letters in the 1980s on war and the economy. Women religious in the United States interpreted the “vision of solidarity” central to *Gaudium et Spes* as a mandate to serve disfranchised members of US society and address pressing social needs of their day. In the 1970s and 1980s they began to work in a wide variety of social programs beyond those administered by Catholic institutions alone: in domestic violence shelters, educational programs for incarcerated women, addiction counseling centers, food banks, and ecological justice programs. Beyond marching at Selma they witnessed in solidarity with striking farmworkers and against nuclear

22 David Hollenbach, SJ, “Commentary on *Gaudium et Spes*,” in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*, eds. Kenneth Himes, OFM, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005), 280–81.

23 *Dignitatis Humanae*, no. 273, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html.

24 Lois Lorentzen, “*Gaudium et spes*,” essay for *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought*, ed. Judith Dwyer (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994), 407.

25 William J. Gould, “Fr. J. Bryan Hehir: Priest, Policy Analyst, and Theologian of Dialogue,” in *Religious Leaders and Faith-Based Politics: Ten Profiles*, eds. Jo Renee Formicola and Hubert Morken (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 201.

proliferation. As Elizabeth Johnson recounts, “implementing [the] council’s mandate, women religious vigorously renewed their lives in accord with the gospel and the spirit of their founders. Consequently they moved toward the periphery, away from a cramped ecclesiastical center.”²⁶

In the subsequent decades different interpretations of Vatican II yielded different ecclesial emphases at times, as well. Just as council participants differed over perceptions of “the world,” postconciliar appraisals of the world as primarily marked by a “culture of death” or “dictatorship of relativism” reconfigured the scope or mode of dialogue invited by *Gaudium et Spes*. Under the most recent papacy we may detect a renewed emphasis on the inclusively communal nature of the search for truth in a conciliar vein, whether in Pope Francis’s emphases on a culture of accompaniment, his desire that shepherds take on the smell of sheep, and his own example (whether in dialogue with Rabbi Skorka or atheists, or boundary-crossing in Holy Thursday rites, or more mundane encounters). In terms of the reach of dialogue partners *ad intra*, Pope Francis’s appointments to the college of cardinals—hailing most recently from Cape Verde, Tonga, Myanmar, and Mozambique—further signal his commitment to engaging global voices reflective of the global church.

Moving forward, if we are to be leaven safeguarding against threats to human dignity and probing more deeply the truly human, Pope Francis’s charge to engage the existential extremities may set the global church on a path toward dialogue essential to that task and reflective of council. His recent remarks about theologians make clear that we too must “smell of the people and of the road and . . . pour oil and wine on the wounds of humankind.” On this model the locus for our academic reflection and our pastoral care must remain at the boundaries lest, as he puts it, they risk collapsing into ideologies that seek to tame the mystery. Deep listening then requires freedom of theological inquiry and courage to genuinely engage outside of not only safe ivory towers but also tempting echo chambers. Commemorating *Gaudium et Spes* calls us to reexamine what practices of broad and deep dialogue our ecclesial and educational institutions foster and whether our own habits sufficiently attune us to the varied echoes of “human.”

Conciliar Understanding of Conscience: To Discern God’s Echo

Beyond its call for genuine dialogue, *Gaudium et Spes* summons the people of God to discernment in light of deep listening, a discernment that likewise requires attending to the echo of God’s voice. The understanding of conscience articulated in *Gaudium et Spes* illuminates precisely this encounter.²⁷ The primacy of the human person is evident in the document’s treatment of conscience, particularly in contrast to earlier emphases on moral norms as objective sources of morality. Moral manuals guided priests in the confessional where matters of conscience were assessed, resolved, and absolved from the sixteenth century to roughly the 1960s. As James Keenan has traced, the focus of concern was conforming to rigors of church (fasting, abstinence) more often than facing challenges of world, and confessors functioned as physicians of the soul or psychiatric caregivers of sinners ill able to discern and execute right moral conduct. For Bernard Haring (secretary of the editorial committee that drafted *Gaudium et Spes*), conscience is rooted in freedom as the possibility of responding to God’s call to do God’s will, the power to do good.²⁸

This conciliar understanding of conscience entails the capacity and willingness to pursue the truth about doing the right thing in concrete, complicated circumstances, rather than having all the answers.²⁹ Understanding conscien

²⁶ Elizabeth A. Johnson, CSJ, “An Ecclesiological Framework,” acceptance speech for LCWR Outstanding Leadership Award, August 15, 2014, <https://lcrw.org/calendar/lcwr-assembly-2014>.

²⁷ See Linda Hogan, *Confronting the Truth: Conscience in the Catholic Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2001).

²⁸ James F. Keenan, SJ, “Vatican II and Theological Ethics,” *Theological Studies* 74 (2013): 165–66.

²⁹ According to the Catholic tradition, conscience entails a three-part structure entailing conscience as innate capacity, process, and judgment.

tious discernment as inclusive of multiple sources of moral wisdom—including the riches of scripture, the wisdom of the Catholic community over the centuries, natural law, insights of church officials and theologians, and moral exemplars, as well as the reflective experiences of those immersed in *on the ground* ministries or the details of legislative analysis—calls for a more complex and proactive endeavor than assumptions that restrict such sources to the teaching authority of the hierarchy alone.³⁰ That said, as one observer notes, “Vatican II’s agenda was not to absolutize conscience [it remains a ‘stern monitor’], but to accord it its proper dignity, within a healthy moral ecology.”³¹

Whereas an understanding of the church hierarchy as the only the reliable interpreter of moral law remains in tension with the shift to this more personalist model of conscience at Vatican II, the Pastoral Constitution issues a call to discern responsibility in light of the gift and challenge of God’s law of love. For conscience is characterized as that “secret core and sanctuary of a person, where they are alone with God whose voice echoes in their depths.” This “encounter with the divine basis of moral obligation is mediated through [a person’s] agency, and hence through the spirit, reason, affections and relationships that constitute human agency.”³² The conciliar recognition that “God’s Spirit is given to all the faithful and not only to those in positions of hierarchical office” also impacts an understanding of conscience and authority. In many corridors, the decades following the council have been marked by reservations that a personalist approach risks error, confusion, or scandal. Some rightly warn that appeals to conscience may too readily offer Catholics an easy “entrance to the cafeteria,” or serve as conversation stoppers; yet genuinely wrestling with the tradition and its demands seems more reflective of the conciliar invitation than are impositions of control via litmus tests or loyalty oaths. The council explicitly calls the church “to be a sign of that kinship which makes genuine dialogue possible and vigorous” (no. 92).

Further, disproportionate focus on avoiding scandal can occlude the primary call to pursue the good, to love. *By contrast* the scandal emphasized in *Gaudium et Spes* concerns polarizing economic and social differences: “For excessive economic and social differences between the members of the one human family or population groups cause scandal, and militate against social justice, equity, the dignity of the human person, as well as social and international peace.”³³ Attuning our attention to the presence and call of God amid the world’s complex realities requires assiduous discernment to be certain, yet discernment undertaken in a spirit of courage and hope rather than fear or cynicism.

On the personalist model of conscience, dialogue and discernment go hand in hand. Ensuring we remain open to both the wisdom of the church’s received tradition and God’s ongoing communication in the world demands we remain ever more thoroughly informed by mutual dialogue at various margins. Again we have several signals to this effect from Pope Francis in these initial years of his papacy, from his primary identification of those on the periphery with the gospel (those destitute, addicted, trafficked)³⁴ to his preference for a street-bound over a risk-averse and “self-referential” church. He has struck chords of “dialogue, discernment, and frontier,” suggesting that our gaze should remain “well fixed upon Christ, always . . . prophetic and dynamic towards the future,” lowering defenses and building bridges to heal the rift between gospel and culture.³⁵ In his interview with a noted

30 David DeCosse, “Conscience Issue Separates Catholic Moral Camps,” *National Catholic Reporter*, November 10, 2009.

31 Tom Massaro, SJ, “The Role of Conscience in Catholic Participation in Politics since Vatican II,” in Erin Brigham, ed., *The Church in the Modern World: Fifty Years after Gaudium et Spes* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 71.

32 DeCosse, “Conscience Issue.”

33 *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 29.

34 On June 6, 2013, the pope received the presiding board of the CLAR (the Latin American and Caribbean Confederation of Religious Men and Women/*Confederación Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Religiosos y Religiosas*). A transcript of the pope’s words was made by those present and given to the Chilean ultraprogressive journal *Reflexión y Liberación* (*Reflection and Liberation*) for exclusive publication. <http://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/2013/06/pope-to-latin-american-religious-full.html>.

35 The pope suggested this to the personnel of the Jesuit journal *La Civiltà Cattolica* (*Catholic Civilization*), which is published in Italian from Rome. Available at <http://www.news.va/en/news/francis-lower-defences-and-open-doors>.

Italian atheist, the pope articulated anew the doctrine of the primacy of conscience, indicating that “the question for those who do not believe in God is to abide by their own conscience.” While this revived concerns regarding his promotion of a “subjective definition of conscience,” his more recent interview with Jesuit journals signals his recovery of the relational and transcendent context for conscience in sync with a person’s sanctuary where God’s voice echoes. There he indicated: “One must affirm Christ, the church, the moral law, what is immediately before us to be done. But one must always hold those goods in tension with the *Deus semper maior*, the always-greater God, and the pursuit of the ever-greater glory of God.”³⁶ The conciliar understanding of conscience reflected here prompts reflections about where and how our church encourages and facilitates lay discernment. Is conscientious discernment in this vein perceived as a threat or as a gift and call? How do different conceptions of conscience reflect divergent understandings of the nature of the truth and of the church?

Reverberations Today: To Awaken to the Echo and Respond

Hence it is already apparent that dimensions of Francis’s papacy resonate with the ecclesiological and moral vision of *Gaudium et Spes*. In my final reflections I wish to briefly suggest ways in which his words and actions not only reflect conciliar themes but also draw our attention to forces that muffle the echo and blunt our conscience. Pope Francis is the first pope in fifty years not to have participated in Vatican II: Popes Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI were all still fighting the battles of the council as it were. Francis was ordained as the council was finishing and assimilated it such that it is a part of him. In his first major interview with Fr. Antonio Spadaro in 2013, the pope was asked about the council’s meaning. Fr. Spadaro reflects, “In light of his previous affirmations, I imagine that he will deliver a long and articulate response. Instead I get the impression that the pope simply considers the council an event that is not up for debate and that, as if to stress its fundamental importance, is not worth discussing at too great a length.” Pope Francis replied, “Vatican II was a re-reading of the Gospel in light of contemporary culture. Vatican II produced a renewal movement that simply comes from the same gospel. Its fruits are enormous. . . . Yes, there are hermeneutics of continuity and discontinuity, but one thing is clear: the dynamic of reading the Gospel, actualizing its message for today—which was typical of Vatican II—is absolutely irreversible.”³⁷

As many observers have noted, in words and example Pope Francis has “signaled a turn away from the doctrinal and institutional concerns of his immediate predecessors and pointed instead to his passionate insistence on the church’s loving engagement with the poor who make up most of the world’s population.”³⁸ Francis’s initial embrace of a poor church for the poor has become a continuous refrain, reverberating in his charge to the church as field hospital, and summons, rooted in the gospel, to a revolution of tenderness. His young papacy’s emphases on collegiality, the local church, and empowerment of the laity also embrace of conciliar themes. If, as O’Malley suggests, the council was more concerned with *how* the church is than with *what* it is (despite their inseparability), Francis’s posture suggests more of a “loving mother” than “world’s moral policeman.”³⁹ In his first major appointment in the United States, the pope named a bridge-builder to lead the Archdiocese of Chicago—a man more prone to dialogue than culture war rhetoric. More recently, he named Bishop Robert McElroy to lead the Diocese of San Diego, a bishop who has argued that Pope Francis’s emphasis on poverty and inequality “demand a transformation of the existing political conversation in our nation.”

36 David DeCosse, “The Primacy of Conscience, Vatican II, and Pope Francis: The Opportunity to Renew a Tradition,” in *From Vatican II to Pope Francis: Charting a Catholic Future*, ed. Paul Crowley, 168–69.

37 Interview with Pope Francis by Fr. Antonio Spadaro, editor-in-chief of the Italian Jesuit magazine *La Civiltà Cattolica*, August 19, 2013. See https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130921_intervista-spadaro.html.

38 Eamon Duffy, “Who Is the Pope?,” *The New York Review of Books*, February 19, 2015, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2015/02/19/who-is-pope-francis/>.

39 John W. O’Malley, “A Vatican II Pope,” *America*, September 24, 2013, <http://americamagazine.org/issue/vatican-ii-pope>.

The pope's apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* likewise reflects with the tone and approach of *Gaudium et Spes* in significant ways. Together with his emphases on evangelization and poverty as exclusion, he warns against the danger of dwelling in the realm of ideas and rhetoric alone, insisting on the priority of reality: "We want to enter fully into the fabric of society, sharing the lives of all, listening to their concerns, helping them materially and spiritually in their needs, rejoicing with those who rejoice, weeping with those who weep; arm in arm with others, we are committed to building a new world" (no. 269). Pope Francis's subsequent call for broader consultation of the faithful regarding their attitudes toward and reception of a range of church teachings and issues in preparation for the recent synod on the family manifests consultation, dialogue, and a vision of the church as the entire People of God. There he encouraged the bishops both to express their views candidly and boldly, and to listen with humility: "With these two attitudes, synodality is achieved." Some observers characterized the debates that ensued as "the most openly contentious since the closure of Vatican II."⁴⁰ Whereas "past synods tended to start with church teaching and talk about how it could be applied to the world," here a more inductive way of reflecting was sought, beginning with lived experiences. In terms of deep and wide listening, the modes of survey (accessibility, range of questions, and data collection methods alike) may not comprehensively capture the experiences and struggles of the laity, but the endeavor on the whole represents a step in a more consultative direction to be certain. Discernment *ad intra* also demands an examination of not only how external realities pose challenges to familial flourishing but also where assumptions enshrined within church teaching (whether about the nature of women or caregiving labor) may also require reconsideration.

One area where Pope Francis extends the emphases in *Gaudium et Spes* is in his attention to the attitudes and structures that muffle the echo of God's call. Whereas the document gives brief mention to the impact of social environments that turn people away from the good, on the whole its analysis of structural injustice and social sin remains weak. Observers note that "Whereas the European church may have felt Christianity had drifted too far from the modern world and sought a reconciliation between church and world (and had most influence upon *Gaudium et Spes*), the Latin American Church felt Christendom had become too identified with the modern world and its structural injustices and sought rather to break away from it."⁴¹ Latin American liberation theology has also been instrumental in developing concepts of institutional violence and social sin out of such contexts.

Francis has repeatedly demonstrated how "healing the wounds" must extend beyond encountering those in need with compassion and justice to healing global indifference. In his homily on Lampedusa, for example, he emphasized the pervasive idolatry that facilitates migrants' deaths and robs us of the ability to weep (a theme he recently revisited in Manila). Amid his admission that even he remains "disoriented," and his plea for the grace to weep, he did not merely condemn "the world" for this indifference and its consequences, but repented: "Forgive us Lord!" whether for being closed in on our own well-being in a way that leads to anesthesia of the heart, or for making global decisions creating situations that lead to these tragedies.⁴² The pope's reflections and symbolism underscore our need for ecclesial and civic repentance from complicity in injustice. He reminds us that naming the reality of sin helps shed light on the structures and attitudes that harm immigrants—and so many other victims of "a throw-away culture." Eliciting conversion from patterns of unjust complicity calls communities beyond intermittent outreach or legislative campaigns. Yet many Christians resist a deeper ethic of solidarity, susceptible as we remain to various (dis)values.

40 Duffy, "Who Is the Pope?"

41 Tanner, *The Church and the World*, 79.

42 "Pope on Lampedusa: 'The Globalization of Indifference,'" Vatican Radio (July 8, 2013), <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-on-lampedusa-the-globalization-of-indifferenc>.

Different elements of social sin—dehumanizing trends, unjust structures, and harmful ideologies—shape complex dynamics at play in such resistance. To continue the immigration example, the primacy of deterrence has institutionalized security concerns rather than concerns for human rights or family unity in US immigration laws; the nation's economic interests have been institutionalized in uneven free trade agreements.⁴³ When concerns about our identity get distorted by xenophobia and fear, anti-immigrant sentiment and ethnic-based hate crimes surge. At a more subtle level, a consumerist ideology shapes citizens' willingness to underpay or mistreat migrant laborers either directly or through indirect demand for inexpensive goods and services. These interconnected attitudes and institutions then produce the blindness that lulls us into equating "law-abiding" with "just" or into apathetic acquiescence.

In *Evangelii Gaudium* Pope Francis warns that our "economy of exclusion and inequality kills." He rightly challenges not only the reductive market ethos dominating trade and migration policies that casts migrants as "pawns on a chessboard," but also its desensitizing effects: "The culture of prosperity deadens us; we are thrilled if the market offers us something new to purchase; and in the meantime all those lives stunted for lack of opportunity seem a mere spectacle; they fail to move us."⁴⁴ The elevation of wealth and influence to absolute status can become an authentic bondage. Idolatries focused on having over being can impede global solidarity as much as nationalistic ones: they shape loyalties, frame questions, inform votes and spending practices.

Discerning the prospects for cultivating the promise of *Gaudium et Spes* in our day requires learning from both challenges and signs of hope that have marked these past fifty years. Engaging complex social realities "on the ground" may help to attune our listening to the conciliar call to dialogue, grassroots engagement, and human rights. By way of one example, the binational Kino Border Initiative operates in Ambos Nogales at our own Lampedusa, the US–Mexico border. During the KBI's painstakingly extensive needs assessment phase, discussions with many individuals on both the Mexico and Arizona sides of the border alerted them to pressing needs: the vulnerability of women on the move and the intransigence of immigration attitudes close to the border. As a result, KBI focused its initial programming to meet these felt concerns—rather than simply sending a Jesuit in to staff a parish there as was initially requested. KBI explicitly understands itself as operating with one foot on either side of the border, as "a point of contact and mutual transformation not only for the migrant community members who encounter one another in the context of [its] programs, but also for the Provinces of California and Mexico, the Missionary Sisters of the Eucharist, and Jesuit Refugee Services."⁴⁵ This posture reflects a "two-way street" of social engagement, modeling partnership and reciprocal "evangelization" in the spirit of *Gaudium et Spes*. In this vein Catholic social action can remain open to ongoing conversion by the suffering and resilience of those in need, rather than triumphalistic in its possession of truth, remote from concrete concerns, or static in its formulations.

Surveying today's signs of the times, persistent human needs continue to strike a chord with Christian responsibility, met with increasing levels of awareness that respecting dignity demands empowering others' agency and sometimes prophetic critiques that disrupt perceived harmony. Where today transnational threats have succeeded the Cold War fears of fifty years past, neoliberal globalization extends some threats then posed by colonialism, and "Selma's" work remains unfinished, we must ask anew: Where do we find deafening silence and where are we at

43 Whereas the aggregate impact of NAFTA or CAFTA is complex, most agree they have taken a negative toll on the most vulnerable populations in Latin America, who rely more than ever on remittances sent home by family members who migrate to the United States. In 2008 the bishops of Mexico directly linked the recent surge in immigration to the United States to the effects of NAFTA on small rural communities whose farmers are unable to compete with heavily subsidized producers north of their border. Chapter four of my *Kinship Across Borders: A Christian Ethic of Immigration* considers this issue in further detail.

44 Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013) no. 54, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

45 Mark W. Potter, "Solidarity as Spiritual Exercise: Accompanying Migrants at the US/Mexico Border," *Political Theology* 12, no. 6 (2011): 842.

tuned to urgent new questions and the invitation to collaborate toward a more humane world? On the paradigm of Lampedusa, where we find church embracing pain with humility, may the church heal those in need; may the church penetrate “soap bubbles of indifference” and anesthesia of the heart; and may the church treat her own wounds, where she falls short of the vision of the council and the proximity of the Reign. Cultivating a culture of encounter and a church for the poor, let nothing authentically human fail to find an echo in our hearts.