The Holy See in the United Nations: An Assessment and Critique

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The Permanent Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations is an eloquent expression of the Roman Catholic Church's solidarity with, and respectful affection for, the whole human race and has many positive aspects and implications. This article outlines its historical development, gives an overview of the dynamics of the Roman Catholic Church-UN relations, and explores the contributions of this Mission. It also provides a creative analysis and assessment of the Holy See's controversial choice of neutrality within the context of the imperative of solidarity that serves as the theological foundation for the Permanent Mission of the Holy See to the UN.

Although the Holy See has the right to vote, it has chosen to refrain from exercising that right in order to maintain the neutrality it deems consistent with the role of a spiritual and moral guide at the UN. I argue that this decision remains seriously problematic. It may lead to the perception that the option for neutrality is effectively a refusal to take decisive and public positions on specific issues and concrete instances of injustice suffered by people around the world. Not only does it call into question the credibility of the Church’s pledge of solidarity with and support for the poor, it arouses the suspicion of a possible ulterior motive, perhaps the need to save face so as to preserve good relations with certain nations. This controversy reflects the unresolved struggle within the Church between what Gregory Baum has called the logic of maintenance and the logic of mission, specifically between a desperate desire to protect the institution and the need for a preferential option on behalf of the poor. Furthermore, it reveals that too often, maintenance takes precedence.

Finally, the neutrality of the Holy See at the UN relates to serious pastoral issues. Indeed, one may wonder what practical, pastoral effect the Holy See could have by renouncing its United Nations voting neutrality. What difference would this renunciation make for the ordinary person in the pew or even for pastoral ministers? What roles can ordinary Catholics play in making the Holy See reconsider its stand on this matter? Such questions are valid and worrisome. However, they should be approached in the wider reality of the present limited awareness and impact of the Church’s presence and activities at the UN in the life of ordinary Catholics and their ministers. This present impact is arguably far less than warranted by the importance of the UN in world affairs and in the lives of ordinary people. It is far less than warranted by the work of the Holy See at the UN. It is also far less than warranted by the now world-wide nature of the social question. Seen in that perspective and in the light of Church history, a more prophetic stance by the Holy See at the UN would be one of many steps toward integrating itself more appropriately into pastoral ministry international issues, the world, and the United Nations. Every op-
portunity for education in Catholic parishes, schools, and other ministries should be used to create this awareness. That is the main goal of this article, to initiate this dialogical conversation as a way to educate Catholics about the presence and activities of their Church at the UN. The historical descriptions and theological analyses provided here are simply meant to guide the ordinary Catholic reader to appreciate and assess the relevance of a UN apostolate in the realization of the salvific mission of the Catholic Church today.

The History and Participation of The Holy See in the UN

By Holy See or Apostolic See, as it is sometimes called, we mean the government of the Roman Catholic Church that is centered around the pope, i.e. the Roman Pontiff and the Roman Curia—the various ministries or departments that assist the Pope in the administration of the universal Church.1 It has the responsibility of discharging the duties of Vatican State, as provided in the Lateran treaty of 1929. This treaty, signed by Benito Mussolini for Italy and Pietro Cardinal Gaspari, the Secretary of State to Pope Pius XI, settled the dispute between the Church and the Italian government following the annexation of the Papal States to central Italy in 1870. It recognized and guaranteed the sovereignty of the Holy See as indisputable by granting it the geographical territory of Vatican City.2

On April 6, 1964, the Holy See established a Permanent Observer Mission at the UN in New York, marking the official beginning of the Church’s presence at the UN.3 Historically, the foundation for this initiative was already laid by Pope Pius XII and Pope John XXIII and inspired by a few Catholic individuals whose words and actions influenced the initial formation of the United Nations itself. Before its official formation, Pope Pius XII had endorsed the UN as a justified response to a plea coming “from the depths and [calling] for justice and a spirit of collaboration in a world ruled by a just and compassionate God.”4 He noted that there was a just and legitimate request of the people of the world for a new international alliance, a “real new world,” that would address the global imbalance fostered by greed, power struggles, rivalry, and hostility that culminated in the Second World War. In his encyclical Summi Pontificatus, “On the Unity of Human Society,” and his Christmas Eve messages, especially that of 1939, otherwise known as the “Peace Program,” Pius stated the need for a new world order and called for its universal support, presenting the principles upon which this order should be structured to ensure peace.5 These documents had a significant influence on several key players in the formation of the UN.6 For instance, the 1941

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5 It is important to mention that Pius XII's experience as a former trained diplomat with a comfortable knowledge of the world's power was very helpful in his appreciation of the war situation and the way forward. It is true that a different interpretation might suggest that his “new world order,” especially as emphasized in his 1939 encyclical Summi Pontificatus(Of the Supreme Pontificate or “Darkness over the Earth, as it was known in English), was simply a call for all nations to once again recognize the sovereignty of Christ, the “King of kings, and Lord of lords,” which had been abandoned with the growth of secularism and what the Pope condemned as “Laicism.” See John Cornwell, Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII (New York: Viking Penguin, 1999), 233. However, his “Peace Plan,” issued later in 1939, as the Christmas Eve message, in its suggested principles for the realization of the “new world order” makes the case that the Pontiff meant a secular world institution or governance rather than ecclesiastical dominion.
6 See “The Christmas Editorials,” Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, December 2, 2008, http://www.catholicleague.org/pius/nyt_editorials.htm. The impact of the Pope at the time was not recognized by religious sources alone. The New York Times editorials on Christmas Day 1941 and 1942 recognized the singular contribution of the Pope, particularly his Christmas Eve messages, towards ensuring a “real new order,” one based on “liberty, justice and love.” These editorials acknowledged the pontiff as “a lonely voice in the silence and darkness enveloping Europe” and described his peace program as richer than the Atlantic Charter in advocating an end
Atlantic treaty, signed by Winston Churchill acting for Great Britain and Franklin D. Roosevelt on behalf of the United States, reflected the principles of the Pope’s Peace Program on almost every issue. Apart from the indirect influence his works exerted on the founders and principal actors in the formation of the UN, Pius XII also made a direct attempt to register the Church as a member of the UN. In 1944, he reportedly asked US Secretary of State Cordell Hull what the conditions and possibilities of the Holy See becoming a member State of the future UN were. Hull apparently responded in the negative, saying, “The Vatican would not be capable of fulfilling all the responsibilities of membership.”

The participation of some Catholic members of national delegations in initial UN conferences bears testimony to early Catholic influence on the organization. With the encouragement provided by the papal Peace Program, considered the indispensable Christian model of peace for the postwar world order, these Catholics actively participated in the formulation of the UN’s foundational documents. Prominent among these committed Catholics was the American laywoman Catherine Schaeffer of the Catholic Association for International Peace, one of the first Catholic non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with a specific relation to the United Nations. Schaeffer participated at the Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C. 1944 meeting, the drafting of the San Francisco 1945 UN Charter, and the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ratified in 1968. Schaeffer and colleagues, such as Alba Zizzamia, also made a lasting contribution in redressing the imbalance caused by disproportionate government influence in the UN. They were responsible for the insertion in the UN Charter of Article 70, which made provision for the inclusion of NGOs in the very structure of the UN. They also sought to place women’s issues on the UN agenda. Mainstreaming women into administrative positions within the organization so early can be credited to the interventions of these Catholic women. From then until this day, Catholic groups, especially NGOs, continue to collaborate with the UN in promoting and implementing its mission. They also continue to have a significant, though indirect, impact on the formulation of UN policies.

Even though, in accordance with the UN policy, Catholic NGOs do not require Holy See sponsorship for their admission into the UN and must maintain their independence from the Holy See as a Member State, they have maintained a healthy relationship with the Holy See UN Mission. Long before the establishment of its UN office at New York, the Holy See collaborated with those Catholic groups already present at the UN, particularly the United States Catholic Conference (USCC) Office for United Nations Affairs. Through these groups, it sought to achieve its goals in certain areas of interest. For example, as Jean Gartlan writes, “It was at the instance of the Holy See that Alba Zizzamia, a staff member of the USCC UN office, and a member of the first Catholic NGOs at the UN, was sent to Geneva in 1950 to monitor the UN Trusteeship Council deliberations on the status of Jerusalem.” Also, of all national monopolies of economic wealth. In its Christmas Day editorial 1941, the New York Times wrote, “… as we realize that he is about the only ruler left on the Continent of Europe who dares to raise his voice at all. The last tiny islands of neutrality are so hemmed in and overshadowed by war and fear that no one but the Pope is still able to speak aloud in the name of the Prince of Peace.”


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7 Rossi, 37.
9 Rossi, 30-33.
11 Jones, “Catholics Were There at the Start.
12 See Rossi, 189, 193, 194; Jean Gartlan, At the United Nations: The Story of the NCWC/USCC Office for United Nations Affairs 1946-1972 (Baltimore, MD: Gateway Press, 1998), 67-77. From Jean Gartlan we read of the enormous influence these Catholic actors had on Eleanor Roosevelt, the chair of the Universal Human Rights Drafting Commission, as they were given many opportunities to address the commission. During both informal and formal discussions, drafters of the UN Human Rights found an original document prepared by the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC) very useful.
13 See Gartlan, 54.
most recently, Olivier Poquillon, O.P, the Dominican Order’s UN representative, attended a European Union event in 2011 representing both his Order and the Holy See. Co-sponsorship of side events at UN conferences is another way the Holy See maintains its outreach to and collaboration with Catholic NGOs.14

It is important to remember that the Holy See had been participating in some international organizations that predate the UN. Its membership in these earlier organizations, such as the Universal Postal Union, International Telecommunication Union, and International Labor Organization, helped pave the way for its present status in the UN. The Holy See began to attend the UN General Assembly’s sessions as an observer in 1951 due to its membership in the Universal Postal Union and International Telecommunication Union.

Like his predecessor, Pope John XXIII devoted significant attention to the UN. His praise of the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is repeatedly echoed in later documents of Catholic social teaching. Not only did Pope John devote a significant section of Pacem in Terris to acknowledging the timeliness of the United Nations and its achievements,15 he also recognized the UDHR as resonating with Catholic principles and natural law theory. His two encyclicals, Mater et Magistra (1961) and Pacem in Terris (1963), also encouraged a healthy Christian participation in, and dialogue with, secular organizations such as the UN. Pacem in Terris sees this participation as a moment of discovering and adhering to the truth and cautions that such a venture not be abandoned on account of a history of past failure. “What was formerly deemed inopportune or unproductive,” he remarked, “might now or in the future be considered opportune and useful.”16

The basis for this hope is grounded on the principles of natural law, the universality of reason, and operative honesty. This orientation differs from nineteenth and early twentieth century ecclesiology, which viewed the Church as “holy and spotless” and looked disdainfully upon the world as sinful and incapable of solving its problems without Church guidance. This understanding of the Church’s self-containment can trace its roots to early scholastic theology, which held the Church to be inherently self-sufficient, in possession of all of the resources required for the fulfillment of her mission, and therefore in no need of mutual and free participation in a secular institution.

The spirit of the new ecclesiology reflected in the documents cited above reflects the Church’s interrelatedness and mutual responsibility with the world and is epitomized in the formation of the Holy See’s UN Mission, April 6, 1964. The theological significance of this new development, the assumption of the permanent observer status in the UN, outweighs its political or historical significance. Considering that this took place barely a year and six months into the proceeding of the Second Vatican Council, it demonstrated the church’s determination to a new theological self-understanding that would reposition her in service of the common good of global humanity for the cause of justice and peace in the world. As Pope Paul VI later declared, this relationship was sought “to solicit, encourage and promote the pursuit of the universal common good and the integral good of [humanity].”17 It is not a privilege but a matter of duty, which must be carried out respectfully and confidently.18

Understanding the Dynamics of the Holy See Permanent Observer Status at the UN

Confusion about the Holy See's nature and presence in the UN requires us to highlight a few key facts, for serious questions arise. Is the Catholic Church involved in the UN as a state or a faith community? What is the difference

14 During the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Brazil (June 2012), the Holy See with Franciscans International, Caritas International, and Catholic Relief Services co-organized a side event titled “Agriculture and Sustainable Societies: Food Security, Land and Solidarity.”
15 See John XXIII, Pacem in Terris (New York: Paulist Press, 1963), nos. 142-145.
17 See Paul VI, “Address to Holy See Representatives to International Organizations,” (September 4, 1974), Paths to Peace, iv.
18 See Agostino Cardinal Casaroli, Paths to Peace, iii.
between the Holy See, Vatican City, and the Roman Catholic Church? What does Non-Member State Permanent Observer status mean? What are the requirements and process for admission, and what are the privileges of this status? Why is the Roman Catholic Church the only religion with this privileged association with the UN?

In its dual role as representative of both the universal Church and the territorial city of the Vatican, the Holy See discharges both temporal and spiritual duties. The Holy See is a true juridical personification of the Catholic Church. It exists and operates in this manner within the international community. Thus, by definition, the Holy See, unlike any other religious entity, can and does legitimately enter into bilateral and multilateral relations with nations and international organizations. Its status at the UN, unique among religious entities, puts it on a par with other member states, a privilege accrued by the virtue of the Lateran Treaty.

In its present relation to the UN, the Holy See enjoys the status of Non-Member State Permanent Observer. UN membership is open to all “peace-loving states which accept the obligations contained in the present Charter and in the judgment of the organization, are able and willing to carry out these obligations.” The privilege of Permanent Observer, though not officially recognized in the UN Charter, has become an enduring custom, granted to states with some limitations to becoming full members of the Organization. To be granted this privilege, the applicant must have fulfilled the requirements stipulated by the UN Office of Legal Affairs. These include full membership in one or more specialized agencies of the UN and recognition as a state by member-states of the UN.

When the Holy See applied for this status in 1964, it had already become a full member of at least two UN special agencies and enjoyed diplomatic relations with at least 14 member states of the UN.

The given fact notwithstanding, there is still a divergence of opinion regarding how the Church came to enjoy this favor. Some groups, especially critics of the Holy See, took John Paul II’s remark that “Pope Paul VI initiated the formal participation of the Holy See in the United Nations Organization, offering the cooperation of the Church’s spiritual and humanitarian expertise” to mean that the Holy See invited itself to the UN. This claim is equally contestable. On the other hand, other groups interpreted then Secretary-General U Thant’s invitation to the Holy See to become a permanent observer at the international human rights organization of the United Nations to mean what the Holy See enjoys today. Whatever confusions may remain on the Holy See’s legitimacy for this privilege, they have been put to rest by recent action of the UN General Assembly. On July 1, 2004, the General Assembly unanimously adopted Resolution A/58/314, acknowledging the Holy See’s privilege as an Observer State of the UN, a status it has enjoyed since the establishment of the Holy See Permanent Observer Mission in the UN on

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19 Cardinale, 83.
20 See UN Charter, 4:1.
22 By 1951, the Holy See began to attend UN General Assembly sessions, and meetings of the World Health Organization (WHO) and UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as an ad hoc observer. It was admitted as a full member of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 1956. See, William Schabas, “Notes on the Legal Status of the Vatican City and Holy See,” (1994), in “The Catholic Church at the United Nations: Church or State?”; Cardinale, 233, in “The Catholic Church at the United Nations: Church or State?”
April 6, 1964. By the same token, it is accorded “the rights and privileges of participation in the sessions and work of the General Assembly and the international conferences convened under the auspices of the Assembly or other organs of the United Nations, as well as in United Nations conferences as set out in the annex to the present resolution …”25 More than a favor done to the Holy See, the confirmation of its status was considered by this resolution as very important for the UN, whose interest is that all States be invited to participate in its work.26

Not only does Observer State status confer on non-members the right to participate in the sessions and works of the General Assembly and other Organs of the UN, it more significantly offers such States some specific privileges due to member states. These include the privilege to place items on the provisional agenda of the GA and greater access to the plenary sessions of the UN and its main committees, as well as to the Security Council. More important among these privileges for this essay is the right to vote in all UN conferences.27

Within this capacity, apart from its presence and office at UN headquarters New York, the Holy See also sends Permanent Observers to other UN offices, such as those in Geneva and Vienna, and to establishments such as the International Labor Organization (ILO), Food and Agriculture Organizations (FAO), High Commission for Refugees, World Health Organization (WHO), Institute for the Unification of Private Law, the International Committee of Military Medicine, World Trade Organization (WTO), and UN Industrial Development Organization.28 Beginning with Paul VI, the Roman Pontiff and the Holy See’s Permanent Observers have addressed the General Assembly on a number of occasions. These addresses take place in a general debate and later the issues are discussed at the committee level, depending on the subject matter. In many of these instances, the various pontiffs have lauded the mission and successes of the UN, though not without drawing attention to its deficiencies. Paul VI, in his address to the twentieth Session of the General Assembly of the UN, praised the labour and sacrifice, even to the point of death, which illustrious men and women of the UN had endured for the cause of peace in the world.29 His reference to the UN as a “great school of learning” in which all participants are students, implying even Church-members, has a huge ecclesiological significance.30 This is another expression of the humble recognition by Vatican II that the Church must not only teach but also learn from the world. The appreciation that the world has something to offer the Church is a humble affirmation of the basic doctrine that the spirit that inspires and permeates the Church is also at work in the world. This theological principle is the basis for the present role of the Holy See as both pupil and teacher in “this great school of learning” that is the United Nations.31

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28 The Holy See is also a permanent observer of the following UN and other international organizations: European Union, International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Latin Union (LU), Organization of American States in Washington (OAS), African Union (AU), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP), United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS), World Tourism Organization (WTO), and World Food Programme (WFP). The Holy See Permanent Observer at the UN headquarters, Geneva, is Archbishop Silvano M. Tomasi, C.S.
30 Pope Paul VI, “Appeal to Peace,” 9, “... The United Nations is the great school ... and we are today in the Assembly Hall of the school. Everyone taking his place here becomes a pupil and also a teacher ...”
31 See Gaudium et Spes, nos. 11, 22. In these sections GS teaches that the “Spirit who leads the Church also ‘fills the earth,’ and the same grace with which the Church is blessed is equally at work in the heart of all men of Good will.”
On many occasions, John Paul II, who visited the UN more than any other pope and for this was fondly referred to by UN news reporters as the pope of the UN, gave credit to the organization for its promotion of human rights and for ensuring respect for the rights of nations, their cultures, and their particular models of development. Benedict XVI has continued in a like manner, as is evident in his visit to the UN and in the various interventions he has made in support of the many good works of the UN. In his speech to the UN General Assembly (April 18, 2008), he recognized “the founding principles of the Organization, the desire for peace, the quest for justice, respect for the dignity of the person, humanitarian cooperation and assistance.”

In a very similar manner, these pontiffs in their addresses pointed out the many factors inhibiting the achievement of the UN’s goals. These include: the lack of authority to carry out its goals; the growing tendency towards nationalism; the non-compliance of states with UN policies; and the failure to consider the common good, especially of those most threatened by hunger and injustice. Paul VI, addressing the twentieth UN General Assembly, maintained, “Your courage and your work impel you to study ways of guaranteeing the security of international life without recourse to arms. This is an aim worthy of your efforts; this is what the peoples of this world expect of you; this is what you must achieve. And for this, unanimous confidence in this institution must increase, its authority must increase; and this goal, one may hope, will be attained …” To the fiftieth UN General Assembly John Paul II said, “The United Nations Organization needs to rise more and more above the cold status of an administrative institution and to become a moral center where all the nations of the world feel at home and develop a shared awareness of being, as it were, a ‘family of nations …”

From the inception of the office of the Permanent Observer mission in 1964 to date, the Holy See has made a series of contributions through submissions that have left a lasting influence on the world’s attempts to significantly reduce suffering and foster an enduring peace in the world. These contributions touch on various areas, such as environment and development, human rights, natural disaster reduction, population and development, social development, women, human settlements, food, and disarmament. Among these, its contribution to the World Summit for Children demands commendation. On June 5, 2001, the Holy See, together with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, co-sponsored a symposium at UN headquarters in New York on children in armed conflict. A complete documentation of these and other submissions and interventions has been compiled by Path to Peace Foundation in its publication, Serving the Human Family: The Holy See at the Major United Nations Conferences. By no means do these achievements make void the reality that there are still areas of this Holy See-UN relation that need improvement.
The Holy See's activities in the UN generally adhere to the traditional pattern of Roman Catholic Church diplomatic affairs. These come under the authority of the Secretary of State, the prime minister/chief executive and foreign secretary, who is represented by the papal delegate, the Permanent Observer. The present representative is Archbishop Francis A. Chullikat. The senior members of the staff of this office are drawn from the curial diplomatic service. This structural composition and its decision-making processes often resurrect the theological debate and irresolvable tension between a hierarchically centralized authority model and a more pluralistic and colligate model.

**Holy See Voting Option and the Imperative of Solidarity with the Poor**

There are other areas of UN activity within which the Holy See might function more effectively. The mere presence of the Holy See in the UN system—a conglomeration of people of every variety—is itself a witness to her embrace of solidarity, of being with the poor and with others for the sake of the poor. As mentioned earlier, through its presence and participation in the UN, the Holy See seeks dignity, equality, social participation, and care for the basic needs of all, especially the most disadvantaged of the world. It continues to seek the transformation of social conditions, solidarity, and openness to transcendental values.\(^{38}\) Still, some of the positions it takes in the UN differ visibly from the manner in which Christ fulfilled the imperative of solidarity, especially in its incarnational aspect.

Regarding its participation in the General Assembly, the Holy See has, of its own volition, chosen observer status instead of full membership, preventing it from voting in the General Assembly or recommending a candidate of its own.\(^{39}\) Even though its Permanent Observer status allows it to vote in other UN conferences, it remains neutral in all voting matters in the UN. It deems this choice consistent with its role as spiritual and moral guide to the organization. To some extent, this neutrality has worked to the Holy See's advantage, as the Rev. Vittorio Guerrera of the Holy See Mission pointed out during my interview with him in November 2008. He referred particularly to the successes of the Holy See in conflict resolution between adversaries, many of whom regard the Holy See as an honest broker. He believes also that this neutral option enables the Holy See, more than any other nation, to respond to issues on the floor of the General Assembly honestly, without fear or favor.

However, the decision not to vote remains problematic; it may lead to the perception that the option for neutrality is effectively a refusal to take decisive and public positions on specific issues and concrete instances of injustice suffered by people around the world. It calls into question the credibility of the Church's pledge of solidarity with and in support of the poor. Many social justice activists would argue that, in any case concerning the poor, no one can afford to be neutral, for neutrality is itself a position—a support of the *status quo*. Thus the Holy See's position arouses the suspicion of a possible ulterior motive, perhaps the need to save face so as to preserve good relations with certain nations with which it enjoys bilateral relations. The same might also apply to its lack of any visible commitment to challenging unjust structures within the UN, another unavoidable imperative of solidarity.

Not voting is obviously a pragmatic judgment that hopefully is based on what is best for carrying out the full mission of the Church, as evidenced in the example cited by the Holy See mission above. In other words, if the Holy See is to exercise its voting right, it might lose its image of a non-political participant, and thus its respect among some States might be jeopardized, especially among those States who see the Holy See's neutrality as a commitment to being an honest broker of peace. However, in particular individual cases, not voting will be detrimental to the option for the poor and the criticism of unjust structures. Take, for instance, the case of Palestine's request for UN membership, a significant step in resolving the age-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On Friday, September

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23, 2011, Palestine, in accordance with the UN Charter and Procedure, requested the Secretary General of the UN submit its application to become a full member of the UN to the Security Council. The request was returned to the General Assembly in September 2012 because of the threatened US veto. It took a majority vote by the General Assembly on November 29, 2012 to make Palestine a state observer, with increased access to the UN system. Such a vote also would increase moral pressure on the US to not use its veto, as it will be very obvious that it is the only opposition. To a Palestinian, whatever genuine concern the Church had shown to Palestinians and any good effects that might be accomplished by the decision not to vote might be offset by the Church’s neutrality and failure to stand up for Palestine’s UN membership, a specific need of the poor and oppressed of Palestine. Another example would be the growing global demand for the review of the UN Charter, the reformation of the Security Council, and the revitalization of the General Assembly. To begin any of these processes requires a majority vote and, in some cases, a consensus of the members of the General Assembly. Again, the choice not to vote would negate all the church’s very vocal criticism of the unjust structure of the UN, as seen in the various popes’ addresses to the UN. This is tantamount to the church not matching her words to her actions.

The biblical and Christological perspective of solidarity highlights its bipolar character, namely its universal and preferential dimensions. The universal dimension refers to our ontological relatedness, by which we have the responsibility to participate with the rest of humanity in a shared effort for the common good. The preferential dimension, emphasized by Gaudium et Spes (no. 1), refers to the special affinity with those who are less privileged or disadvantaged in society, particularly those impacted by systemic causes within the structures of human society. The distinction between the two dimensions, universal and preferential, is then expressed as “coming together” and “going over to the other side.” Properly interpreted, the poles of solidarity, though distinct, are not separated in practice, as illustrated by Christ’s own practice. His incarnation and redemption are both demonstrative of his identification with our entire humanity and of his preferential options for specific individuals, especially those on the margins of society.

From his example, we learn that solidarity is not merely virtual and sentimental. Rather, it is “practical, embodied, and comes at a cost: ‘the uncomfortable, challenging, disruptive aspects of a face-to-face, shoulder-to-shoulder way of acknowledging our ‘we-ness.’” As the post-conciliar document, Sollicitudo rei Socialis, proclaims, “Solidarity then, is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are really responsible for all.” Christ did not withdraw from choices that constituted an option for the poor, even at the risk of misrepresentation of his identity as the sinless one. Jesus’ sinlessness, an act of solidarity, is his fidelity to his mission; his continuous choice of others, not self, so “that they may have life and have it to the full” (Jn10:10).

Some specific actions of Christ, such as his baptism, a meal at the Pharisee’s home, being in the company of women, going to the graveyard to deliver the demoniac, and touching the leper, all reveal this idea of solidarity as a continuous choosing of others, not self, at the cost of risking his identity as the sinless one. This is illustrated by John the Baptist’s hesitation to baptize him and the Pharisees’ criticism of his activities as inconsistent with their expectation of the son of God. William Reiser holds that the early Church universalized Jesus’ solidarity with the people of Israel, ritually expressed when he received John’s baptism, in order to encompass the whole human sto-

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ry.\textsuperscript{42} He has no need of baptism, Matthew writes, yet Christ filed out with his people for John's baptism. It was more an act of identifying with his people in their brokenness, because he felt the weight of their depression caused by the structures of sin. Rather than stand aloof from the crowd, Jesus was part of the people wailing, yearning, and seeking their God, desiring to cross over the threshold of new life that God was offering through the Baptist. The baptism and other activities of Christ’s solidarity provide us with both the opportunity and the criterion for judging such Christian activities of solidarity as the Holy See’s UN voting option.

The presence of Holy See and the many actions it has taken for the common good in the UN witness to the universal aspect of solidarity. Concerning the preferential dimension of solidarity—unconditional commitment to standing with those oppressed, with the outcasts and those on the margin of society—the Holy See’s choice of neutrality in all voting matters in the UN remains questionable and controversial. Reconsidered in the light of Christ’s example, this choice suggests that this particular option is an ineffective or inadequate witness to solidarity with the poor at least in some circumstances.

The choice for neutrality is inconsistent with the theological and ecclesiological self-understandings of Vatican II that support the Holy See’s activities in the socio-political realm. It belongs rather with the practice of the pre-conciliar Church’s obsession with preserving its identity. The pre-conciliar Church would not get involved in anything that would mar its image, no matter how noble the cause. This neutrality supports the criticism of many today, that even though the Church of Vatican II expresses deep compassion for the poor, it has not exhibited enough evidence of its solidarity with them. I see this situation in terms of Gregory Baum’s expression of the unresolved struggle in human institutions between the \textit{logic of maintenance} and \textit{logic of mission}—between a desperate desire to protect itself and the need for preferential solidarity—and how much the former often takes precedence.\textsuperscript{43}

Although the two logics are essential for the survival of any institution and the realization of institutional goals, all too often institutions give unjustified precedence to maintenance. Thus, the good programs of these institutions are often sacrificed to the desire to protect the status of the institute. Where this is the case, there is an often distorted obsession with institutional perpetuation and support to the detriment of the very purpose for which it was established. The Church, like any other institution, can get caught up in this exaggerated attention to the logic of maintenance. To preserve its dignity, it is sometimes reluctant to take action that might place its self-image at risk in the sight of other nations, even when these decisions would benefit the poor. It is within this tendency that the Holy See’s neutrality in every vote becomes a betrayal of the true characteristic of incarnational solidarity as \textit{being-with}, even in the face of personal discomfort. Pope Benedict XVI recently alluded to this tension between the logic of maintenance and logic of mission and the fact that the former often wins to the detriment of the later. Addressing representatives of Catholic associations active in the life of the Church and society at Freiburg on September 25, 2011 on the occasion of his visit to Germany, the pontiff says, “In the concrete history of the Church, however, a contrary tendency is also manifested … She gives greater weight to organisation and institutionalisation than to her vocation to openness.”\textsuperscript{44} In his analysis, he referred to this in terms of worldliness of the Church. By this he means the Church becoming too settled in this world, adapting herself to the standards of the world and


\textsuperscript{43} Gregory Baum, \textit{Theology and Society} (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 239, 243.

\textsuperscript{44} See Pope Benedict XVI, “It is Time for the Church to Set Aside Her Worldliness,” A Speech to Representatives of Catholic Society Active in the Life of the Church and Society, Freiburg, September 25, 2011, http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=9735.
to the feeling of self-sufficiency. He therefore recognizes the need and the urgency for the Church to “constantly rededicate herself to her mission, [of] filling the world with God’s word and in transforming the world by bringing it into loving unity with God.” 45 To accomplish this task adequately, she must commit herself to a renewed effort to detach herself from the worldliness of the world, such as those logic maintenance proclivities identified in this work—self-preoccupation, self-centeredness, and self-preservation. Without this liberation, her missionary activity, especially in the context of new evangelization that supports such participation in the United Nations, will not maintain its credibility.

From the example of Christ’s sinlessness as solidarity emerges a new understanding of dignity in which sin becomes anything that prevents us from experiencing or exercising solidarity with others because it is fundamentally a choice of self over others and over God. Examples of such defects, with which the Church still struggles, include self-centeredness, self-preoccupation, and self-preservation. To be the chosen of Christ implies that we are loved and are enabled to choose others and God. It is allowing self-love to prevent us from realizing our vocation of living for others that, more than unpopular actions, mars our dignity and identity as a compassionate Church. In order to fulfill its desired vision, in the light of the theological self-understandings of the UN mission, the Holy See must pay heed to these new soteriological implications of solidarity. In reality, the obsession for self-preservation, as Christ foretold in John’s gospel, initiates its own decline. “Whoever loves his life will destroy it, and whoever despises his life … keeps it” (Jn 12: 20-27).

The real problem with the logic of maintenance is that it creates a divide between what the institution says and what it does. The Church’s official social teaching promotes the logic of mission, yet in practice this teaching seems to be struggling with some inconsistent actions, such as the voting choice we are discussing. Situations like this may lead some people to wonder whether the Church applies its social teaching to itself. How can one interpret this action, the choice of neutrality, in light of Benedict XVI’s insistence that defending, articulating, and witnessing the truth are the exacting and indispensable forms of our charity? 46 Voting is a unique demonstration and articulation of one's conviction to a truth, as well as one's commitment to defending and witnessing that truth. It does not matter which side one votes; all that matters is that our vote is our voice. The veracity of this statement makes more obvious the problematic nature of the Holy See's neutrality. Thus the Holy See's critics would conclude that either the Holy See is not convinced of the seriousness of UN decisions, it is afraid to stand for what is the truth at all times, or it is serving some ulterior motive. The argument of diplomacy, its dynamics, and knowing how to play the game, which has been conjured by some Holy See supporters, may not be an effective defense.

Examples of the way Christ lived out the implications of this incarnational solidarity reveal another aspect of solidarity that has often been taken for granted by the Church, especially in its UN mission. Solidarity with Christ’s experience involves not only mutual support and cooperation but also includes a critique of the diametrically opposed attitudes of structures of sin found in the socio-economic and political arena. While Jesus identified with humanity in its pursuit of abundant life, he also chastised humanity for those activities and lifestyles that contributed to its own sufferings. Some examples of this are seen in the way he challenged the structures of his society, exemplified in his attack on temple activities (Mk 11:15-18). He put His life at risk by challenging the ‘business as usual’ attitude in his time. Being hopeful about the world is not the same as being “naively optimistic.” 47 Hope does not refrain from remarking, often quite critically, on imbalances and failures in the system within which we work. We again recall Saint Augustine’s understanding of human institutions and the Christian’s responsibility to them.

45 Pope Benedict XVI, “It is Time for the Church to Set Aside Her Worldliness.”
To him, within every social institution is a paradox of grace (love) and sin (sin) and their role. It is for the Christian who participates in them to work to increase opportunities for love (a commitment to common good) and to diminish opportunities for lust (the hunger to dominate) that are present in these institutions. Thus the Holy See must add to its UN activities a vocal and strong opposition to the unjust structures within the UN system itself, so that the UN may provide for the sincere, energetic, and generous cooperation of all people.

Examples of UN structural issues include the present composition of the General Assembly, the main decision-making body of the world community, which consists exclusively of state governments, with minimal participation and no active voice accorded to non-government agencies. The immense power vested in the Security Council by the founders of the UN to deal with violations of peace has proven a structural deficiency that often thwarts its responsibility to protect humanity from violence. The managerial and financial unaccountability and the inequitable dispersion between male and female staff of the Secretariat are also systemic issues that compromise the transparency and honesty of the UN system. There are also cases of inconsistencies and incompleteness in the foundational documents of the UN that stand between it and the realization of its goals, such as the peace, equality, freedom, and development of all peoples and sovereignties.

While it collaborates with the UN in achieving its goal of advancing peace and development in the world, the Holy See is equally called to stand against injustice in all structures, including the UN itself. With a prophetic voice, it is to speak courageously about truth, justice, fairness, and love. It will be more unchristian for a Christian representative to remain indifferent in such moments. The Holy See's campaign in this regard would not be without sacrifice and political risk. Yet, it is only in refusing to remain mute in the face of injustice that it deserves to hear the praise, “You have come here as Christians, and what you have done is truly Christian.”

Finally, as we have seen in this reflection, it is obvious that the real issue is not whether the Holy See should participate or even be present in the UN. The real question is how to improve its participation so that it may bear the desired fruits that witness to the basic theological and pastoral principle of solidarity that gives foundation to its activities. The Holy See's joining the UN in the universal concern and pursuit for lasting peace and human security expresses its solidarity with the poor and with the whole human family in its struggle for a better life. Yet its refusal to vote in all matters in the UN betrays another equally important aspect of the principles of incarnational solidarity.

Since this discussion is still open, as the former Permanent Observer, Archbishop Celestino Migliore, suggests, I think it is time for the Holy See to re-evaluate critically its position. How we stand with the poor following the example of Christ remains the basis of our solidarity with and for the poor. As Richard Gaillardetz writes, “The Church is a Church of the poor to the extent that it stands in solidarity with the powerlessness of the poor in this world and looks to the crucified Christ, who embraced powerlessness on the cross and effected its transformation in the resurrection.” This re-evaluation may also sharpen the dilemma of the Holy See remaining both a state and a Church: on the one hand, to vote jeopardizes the Church's role as a spiritual and moral guide at the UN and other institutions, but on the other hand, to remain neutral may compromise its role as defender of the poor.

Every Catholic, irrespective of his/her position, has a role to play in our Church as it faces these issues. The first step, as I mentioned in the beginning of this article, is attending to the limited awareness ordinary Catholics have about this mission of the Church. That includes enabling them to appreciate the social question as a world-wide issue.

issue as well as an everyday faith life issue. Church documents from before the Second Vatican Council had already begun to see the social question as a world-wide issue. Concurrently, Popes have gradually but progressively brought their teaching into global context. Pope Paul VI made his key visit to the UN, bringing the Second Vatican Council itself (1965). Letters by Pope John Paul II to youth (1985), families and children (1994), and the elderly (1999) were written as part of special UN celebratory years. This same Pope also spoke of work in his 1982 address to the UN’s ILO. Pope Benedict XVI spoke on hunger in 2009 to the UN’s FAO. Pope Francis spoke on international cooperation and care for the poor in an address to the FAO in June 2013.

These concerns for universal solidarity are always held in harmony with the principles of subsidiarity. John Paul II observes in Sollicitudo rei Socialis that concern for the global should not diminish concern for the local. Instead, both levels of concern should complement each other. Without such unity of complementarity, solidarity may give way to a demeaning paternalistic social assistance and subsidiarity to social privatism.

Further examples of the UN as occasion or context for specific Church teaching could be multiplied over and over. So could examples of the gradual, progressive shifting within the Church of the social question into a world-wide issue. We cannot predict how much time it will take for the ordinary person in the pew, pastoral ministers, and the church as a whole to integrate fully this world-wide shift of the social question. Many obstacles stand in the way, including excessive nationalism, anti-UN ideologies, and a legitimate need to focus exclusively upon what is local, among others. The lack of sufficient catechetical materials focusing on this issue shows how far we have to go.

Some positive signs of this can already be seen. Every year the Holy See organizes a one week educational program, “Catholic Social Teaching Seminar,” for youths and college students. The Holy See Mission uses this opportunity to introduce to these young people its activities at the UN and to other social questions of our time. Similar education programs are also organized by Catholic NGOs working with the UN. Those of religious congregations hold series of seminars and workshops around UN issues to educate their constituencies about their work at the UN. They emphasize the significance of such activities as witnessing to their call to follow Christ as religious today. Since 1999, IMCS-Pax Romana, “a Catholic Confederation of students from all over the world,” has brought the UN’s agenda on human rights to both its members and diocesan promoters of justice and peace through its two annual internship programs. On these occasions for on-going formation, theologians are often invited to interact with UN presenters. Participants assume responsibility for organizing similar events at their local campuses. It will be important to see some of these seminars organized in parishes across the global in order to reach a larger audience of the Catholic faithful.

Church teaching is clear and emphatic: the social question as a constituent part of preaching the Gospel is now world-wide. Myriad factors of Church life, renewal, and pastoral activity promote increased awareness of this reality. But a particularly glaring missing piece of the puzzle is a more prophetic UN presence of the Holy See—the witness of its vote.