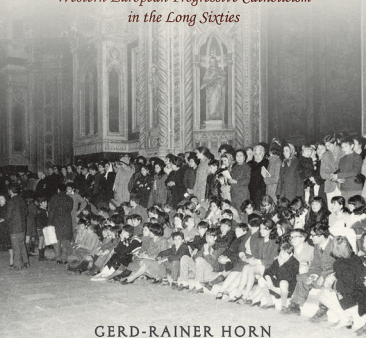


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THE SPIRIT *of* VATICAN II

*Western European Progressive Catholicism
in the Long Sixties*



GERD-RAINER HORN

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Archival work for this book has been carried out in close to two dozen different institutions in Belgium, France, Italy, Netherlands, and Spain. Without this network of primary source deposits, all-too-frequently maintained and kept accessible by selfless volunteers, historians, especially historians of non-elite movements and intellectual currents, would literally have to close shop. In a day and age of mantra-like austerity politics across the European continent, it must be hoped that this lifeline for historians will continue to survive.

The list of individuals who have helped this monograph to become reality is far too long to recite in toto. I can only list a representative few. An indispensable conversation partner for the crucial Dutch dimension of Second Wave Left Catholicism was the erstwhile spiritus rector of Septuagint, Jan Ruijter. The various telephone calls to him I made over the past years have assisted me greatly in measuring Septuagint's national *and international* influence at a crucial moment in the development of Western European progressive Catholicism. My father-in-law, André Tanghe, lived the spirit of Vatican II as a dynamic and committed grassroots activist in the city of Ghent, Belgium. His patient advice and explanations helped me tremendously in understanding the meaning and the message of Vatican II.

The person who has consistently—by now for more than fifteen years—given me sound advice and a grounding in the vagaries of French progressive Catholicism is Yvon Tranvouez. I will never forget our first all-evening-long conversation in a neighbourhood bar in Milan, long after we first met during a workshop in Leuven. In Spain, Feliciano Montero performed a role in my discovery of the Spanish dimension similar to Yvon for the case of France. Our first meeting in the *Parque del Retiro* in Madrid made it clear—I think for both of us—that we operate on similar wavelengths, and yet another friendship organically emerged out of an intellectual affinity.

In Italy, two calm and generally rather reserved individuals played essential roles in allowing me access to what turned out to be indispensable resources. When we first met, Giovanni Avonto, a retired trade union and political

activist of first-rate calibre, now the head archivist of the Fondazione Vera Nocentini, drew up a list of names and phone numbers of individuals and organizations that he felt I should contact in or near Turin; I was then at the very beginning of my series of archival journeys throughout Italy. Urbano Cipriani, in his unassuming way, played a similarly crucial role in my attempt to reconstruct the lifeworld and microcosm sui generis of Florentine progressive Catholicism. It is entirely due to him that a selection of photos emanating from the remarkable Historical Archive of the Comunità dell'Isolotto grace the pages—and the front cover—of this book. I should add that Urbano was also the photographer who in fact took most of the photos forty-five years ago as a young teacher and activist.

Two individuals deserve special mention in this sketchy and all-too-brief line-up of persons without whom this book would never have come to be. Carlo Carlevaris, who has an important cameo role in Chapter 2, hosted me twice for week-long stretches of time in his rooftop apartment in the San Salvario neighbourhood behind the Porta Nuova station in Turin, visits that usually lasted into the evening hours each day. His permission to give me free access to his copious personal archive opened up entirely unforeseen dimensions to the arguments in my book. His engaging accounts of his life story and the milieus which he helped to generate and flourish, spiced up with colourful anecdotes, did even more than his paper archive to make history come alive.

Vittorio Rieser, a key player behind the scenes in Turin and Italian New and Far Left politics ever since his engagement with the early *operaisti* in the late 1950s, knew Italian postwar history and politics like no one else. A secular non-conformist Marxist all of his life, he was consistently open to a kaleidoscope of viewpoints from a great variety of perspectives. An irregular participant in various events at the Waldensian study and retreat centre of Agape to the west of Turin high up in the Alps, Vittorio likewise frequented one of the early prototypes of subsequent base communities, the *Circolo Emmanuel Mounier*, in the early sixties. It was Vittorio who set me on the elusive track of the *Comunità del Vandalino*, and it was Vittorio who introduced me to Giovanni Avonto and Carlo Carlevaris. We usually met over some glasses of Nebbiolo at apero time in one of the outdoor cafés on the magnificent Piazza Vittorio Veneto. Vittorio Rieser died on 21 May 2014. It is hard to believe that there will be no more congenial hours spent chatting with and learning from Vittorio.

I wish to dedicate this book to the two individuals who, to me, incorporate the spirit of Torinese and Italian social movements in the age of Vatican II and the *sessantotto* more than anyone else: Carlo and Vittorio.

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Introduction

Second wave Left Catholicism in Western Europe emerged in the course of the 1960s, especially in the wake of Vatican II, and it rode the crest of its popularity in the years, approximately, 1968–1975. Paradoxically, its period of maximum impact on European society coincided with a strengthening of counter-movements within the Catholic church. The honeymoon phase of second wave progressive Catholicism was thus limited to three short years: 1965–8.

This monograph forms the sequel to my 2008 *Western European Liberation Theology. The First Wave, 1924–1959*, but it also serves as a companion volume to my 2007 *The Spirit of '68. Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956–1976*. For, when researching and writing *The Spirit of '68*, I already felt that, at some future time, I would want to devote special attention to the Catholic contribution to 'global 1968'. I thus decided to save the Catholic motivations and energies behind '1968' for a volume dedicated to this subject all on its own. Interestingly, of the wealth of, mostly rather favourable, reactions to *The Spirit of '68*, not one critic complained about the absence of the religious dimension in that volume.

This curious failure to observe what I would regard as a major lacuna in *The Spirit of '68*—even if wilfully designed to leave religion aside—highlights the general state of myopia within the historical profession with regard to the dynamic behind social movements in late modern Western European society. Characteristically, Eric Hobsbawm, in his quartet of stimulating introductory texts to Modern European History, no longer devoted specific chapters to Religion after 1848 on the grounds that Religion was no longer sufficiently important to deserve specific treatment. With few notable exceptions—the most recent laudable attempt to integrate religion into the story of social movements in and around 1968 is the edited volume on *Europe's 1968. Voices of Revolt*—the 1960s and 1970s are treated as virtually exclusively secular affairs. It is, in part, to correct this misconception that I have written this book.

The range of countries covered in some depth includes, above all, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Italy, and Spain. *The Spirit of Vatican II* should thus also be seen as part of my continuous attempt to include Mediterranean

Europe in an overall assessment of Western European history and politics—and the recognition of the centrality of the ‘lands between’—in this case Belgium and the Netherlands—as promising terrain for historical investigations. The range of countries could have easily been extended to include Austria, Germany, Portugal, and Switzerland, but Lenin’s dictum, ‘Better Fewer But Better’, appeared to me of sufficient relevance to limit my gaze to five countries alone.

In fact, not all chapters cover the five topics chosen in a comprehensive manner with supporting evidence from all national cases studied. As in my earlier monographs, I wish to highlight that I have never intended to present an encyclopedic approach. It is often far more instructive to showcase particularly distinctive samples of the issues at hand, rather than to attempt the impossible: a discussion of *all* relevant manifestations of a given trend.

Thus, Chapter 1 covers only what I regard as the most important and the most promising theological conclusions of Vatican II. Also within this chapter, I include a selective survey of the most stimulating and influential contributions by post-conciliar theologians. It may raise eyebrows that I open up this monograph with a discussion of the intellectual heritage of progressive (Western European) theology in the 1960s and 1970s, rather than a hands-on portrayal of grassroots radical action. I remain convinced, however, that, certainly in this particular instance, Hegel won out over Marx. Without the breakthrough achieved at Vatican II, without the imprimatur of the World Council of the Catholic Church to positively engage with the hopes and the challenges of the modern world, the second wave would have never come about—or, at any rate, it may well have arisen in the wake of 1968, but it would never have gone very far.

Chapters 2 and 3 take a closer look at the two most influential institutional innovations of this second wave of Left Catholicism. Chapter 2 reveals the hitherto virtually unknown history of radical priest associations, which shook up the Catholic world in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Here my attention is twofold. I first present a select survey of key moments in the development of the second wave of the worker priest experience which, despite its far greater social implantation when compared to the first, is to date far less well known than the earlier wave of the late 1940s and early 1950s. And I then cast light on an entirely unprecedented additional phenomenon of the sacerdotal experience in the long sixties: the rise and fall of the Christian Solidarity International Congress, an irreverent and fearless association of radical (mostly parish) priests operating in all Catholic states.

Chapter 3 focuses on yet another innovation of second wave Left Catholicism: the truly impressive sudden emergence of Christian base communities across Western Europe. Today often seen as a feature of radical Catholicism peculiar to Latin America and, subsequently, other Third World states, I draw attention to the equally vibrant European dimension of the attempt to

construct 'authentic Christian communities' outside the traditional structures (parishes, etc.) of the Catholic church, ceaselessly engaged in fraternal reflections as much as in concrete actions. It was in the course of penning this chapter that I decided to limit my analysis and description to one country only, Italy, and then only to the formative years of this experience up to 1970. This choice appeared to be the best way to get across the singularity, vitality but also the multiplicity of initiatives that can be justifiably included under the label of 'base community'.

Chapters 4 and 5 seek to portray the particular contributions of Left Catholic energies to the two overarching social movements which are readily associated with the long sixties: student movements and radical workers' movements. Chapter 4 traces the outlook of what I regard as the Catholic roots of '1968' in a variety of unexpected locations. This chapter perhaps comes closest to furnishing a survey of flagship personalities and capstone moments in a number of states. Chapter 5 attempts to do the same for the powerful wave of workers' struggles in the wake of 1968.

In both Chapters 4 and 5 significant attention is placed on events in Spain which, to some extent, formed an anomalous case in Western Europe. Here the radicalization of Catholic communities had already begun in the 1950s, a result of the peculiar political conditions of Francoist Spain. The Spanish contribution to second wave Left Catholicism in fact preceded the stimulus emanating from Vatican II. In one sense, then, Spanish Left Catholicism experienced a cycle of activism somewhat separate from most other Western European phenomena of this kind. Spanish Left Catholicism, virtually unknown to the north of the Pyrenees to this day, was not only a pioneering venture, but it may stand as a powerful reminder that, in the last analysis, it is material conditions which give rise to social movements, new theologies, and apostolic experiments, rather than new theologies spawning grassroots action as if by spontaneous generation—and thus, ultimately, that Marx may win out over Hegel after all.

The full list of what is missing in this book would be longer than its table of contents. I only wish to point to a few select topics which, given the constraints of time and space, I ultimately felt constrained to leave unaddressed in these pages. In the process of carrying out my archival research, I collected materials on a variety of organizations which I originally intended to include in my text. They include the rich holdings of the Italian wing of the Christian Solidarity International Congress, Sette Novembre, deposited in the Archive of the Italian Senate in Rome; the most important holding of materials on French base communities, the Fonds Bernard Besret at the Centre de Recherche Bretonne et Celtique in Brest; the wealth of papers on the history of the Gioventù Italiana di Azione Cattolica in the Istituto Paolo VI in Rome; and the Archive of the Juventud Obrera Cristiana in Madrid.

The same goes for those materials I collected in the archives of leading international associations of specialized Catholic Action. I barely scratched

the surface in my closing subsections of Chapters 4 and 5 where I draw on the profusion of materials collected in the archives of the Jeunesse Étudiante Catholique Internationale in Nanterre and the Mouvement Mondial des Travailleurs Chrétiens in Leuven. Readers will also search in vain for references to the materials I collected in the archival holdings of the Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne Internationale in Brussels and the Mouvement International de la Jeunesse Agricole et Rurale Catholique in Leuven—or the documents on the fascinating conjuncture of largely Catholic-inspired radical farmers' movements in the Loire Atlantique, which I collected in the Centre d'Histoire du Travail in Nantes.

Given that second wave Left Catholicism has not yet been succeeded by a third wave in more recent decades, there will be no sequel to this monograph. But I hope to find the time to process my documents from these aforementioned holdings on future occasions and in forthcoming publications—*si Dieu le permet*.

Vatican II and Post-conciliar European Theology

On Pentecost Sunday (3 June) 1963, Pope John XXIII died in the papal palace in Vatican City. Few other popes in history had ever caused so much upheaval within the Catholic church in so few years as Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli. Indeed, it is of more than symbolic relevance that one of the most iconoclastic gadfly intellectuals of the twentieth century, Hannah Arendt, entitled her review of the 1965 English translation of John XXIII's compendium of spiritual exercises and reflections 'The Christian Pope', an irreverent title whose multiple meanings were further enhanced by the *New York Review of Books*' editorial decision to drop the question mark from the published version of Arendt's views.¹

Pope John XXIII died less than eight months after the commencement of the World Council of the Catholic Church, dubbed Vatican II. The council itself continued for another two-and-a-half years; yet already at the time of Roncalli's death, it was clear beyond a shadow of a doubt that his pontificate would leave a mark on world history in more ways than one. Nothing like this had been expected from Angelo Roncalli when he was chosen to succeed Pius XII on 28 October 1958.

GETTING VATICAN II OFF THE GROUND

As Étienne Fouilloux has recently reminded us, today's largely non-controversial assessment of the pontificate of John XXIII as a key moment of crisis and opportunity in church history clashes with virtually every single prediction made at the onset of his pontificate. Mostly seen as a relatively colourless bureaucrat in the diplomatic corps of the Vatican state, Roncalli had been chosen precisely because he was expected to fulfil his designated role as a

¹ Hannah Arendt, 'The Christian Pope', *New York Review of Books*, 17 June 1965.

pope of 'transition' in a dignified and, above all, calm and uncontroversial manner. After Pius XII, who had made his mark as a hardline opponent of progressive currents within the church, what was needed was an efficient mediator to calm the troubled waters. And, initially at least, it appeared to the papal curia that John XXIII would indeed become a worthy successor to Pius XII's conservative tradition.

In September 1959, the Secretary of the Holy Office, Cardinal Pizzardo, closed the last major remaining loophole for the continued operation of the worker priest experience, which had been at the centre of controversies within the European Catholic church in the late 1940s and early 1950s. And Pizzardo could count on the full support of Roncalli in this move.² Such conservative instincts were by no means rare survivals of 'the spirit of Pius XII' after the latter took leave of his earthly pursuits. Even as late as June 1962, four months before the official opening of the actual deliberations of Vatican II, the Holy Office warned all believers against the nefarious consequences of the thought of Teilhard de Chardin, who had attempted to bring the Catholic church in alignment with the insights of modern science. It comes as little surprise, then, that, commenting on the occasion of John XXIII's death, the Jesuit Robert Roquette recalled that 'the least which one could say is that we expected nothing from his pontificate' when the papal conclave chose the former Vatican ambassador to Paris to succeed Pius XII.³

Even for the curia in Rome, the call to establish a new council, aired to a small group of cardinals, came as a surprise. The announcement of what eventually was called 'Vatican II' was largely a personal decision by John XXIII. At that time, of course, even Roncalli himself had as yet no clear idea of the precise dimensions of the forces that he would thereby unleash.⁴ Slowly, efforts got under way to organize the institutional infrastructure which would permit the necessary preparation of such a world council. And such a gestation period was all the more necessary as literally no one had expected such a decision at this particular time. Even such a leading proponent of fundamental change as Yves Congar noted in his diary in July 1960: 'Personally, I have applied myself to activate the public so that it expects and demands quite a bit.

² Gerd-Rainer Horn, *Western European Liberation Theology 1924–1959. The First Wave* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 289–90.

³ This information including the citation by Roquette is taken from Étienne Fouilloux's recent reflections, 'Essai sur le devenir du catholicisme en France et en Europe occidentale de Pie XII à Benoît XVI', *Revue théologique de Louvain* 42 (2011), p. 534.

⁴ For a more detailed reconstruction of the atmosphere and an assessment of the issues behind the official launching event for Vatican II in the early summer of 1959, see Giuseppe Alberigo, 'The Announcement of the Council. From the Security of the Fortress to the Lure of the Quest', in Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (eds), *History of Vatican II*, Vol. I: *Announcing and Preparing Vatican Council II. Towards a New Era in Catholicism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), pp. 1–54.

I have never ceased to say on all occasions: maybe only five per cent of that which we will have asked for will come to pass. One more reason to increase our demands.⁵

If the erstwhile 'Left Opposition' within the Catholic church went on the offensive, their counterparts in the well-established seats of ecclesial power did the same, the latter appearing to have all the trump cards in their hand. In June 1960, ten preparatory commissions were established, each one dealing with a specific theme of the coming council. The curia naturally expected to call all the shots in the nomination of these all-important commissions which, in more ways than one, were to fix the agenda of the council itself. Yet there soon emerged countervailing forces at work, not the least of them Pope John XXIII himself, whose most important decision in this regard may well have been to keep the Supreme Congregation of the Holy Office, the ideological watchdog of the Catholic church, formerly known as 'The Inquisition', at arm's length in the preparatory period. In the end, despite the preponderance of the Roman curia in most commissions, many non-Italian bishops, unorthodox theologians, and even theologians hit by sanctions in the dark years of Pius XII's pontificate managed to find their way onto those preparatory commissions.⁶

Now began a tug of war. Yves Congar reports, for instance, that, when the preparatory commission for theology received some guidelines at the onset of their work, they were thoroughly imbued with the spirit of Pius XII. In fact, Congar wrote, the points of view expressed within this document were 'more or less similar to the way they would have been stated at the First Vatican Council in 1868'.⁷ Despite notable improvements (from the point of view of progressive forces) in the process of elaborating the various schemes to guide the forthcoming council, when the schemes were sent to the bishops-at-large in the summer preceding the opening of Vatican II, their reactions 'expressed dissatisfaction, emphasizing the disparity between the perspectives indicated by the pope and the orientation of these schemata'.⁸ Another historian adds: 'Disappointment and dissatisfaction were particularly widespread in Central European circles and among many missionary bishops who had some contact with them.'⁹

⁵ Yves Congar, *Mon journal du Concile*, Vol. I (Paris: Cerf, 2002), p. 4.

⁶ On the work of the preparatory commissions, note above all Giuseppe Alberigo and Alberto Melloni (eds), *Verso il Concilio Vaticano II (1960-1962). Passaggi e problemi della preparazione conciliare* (Genoa: Marietti, 1993).

⁷ Cited in Giovanni Turbanti, 'Vatican II et son monde', in Alberto Melloni and Christoph Theobald (eds), *Vatican II, un avenir oublié* (Paris: Bayard, 2005), p. 59.

⁸ Giuseppe Alberigo, *A Brief History of Vatican II* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), p. 15.

⁹ Gerald P. Fogarty, 'The Council Gets Underway', in Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (eds), *Vatican II, Vol. II: The Formation of the Council's Identity. First Period and Intersession. October 1962-September 1963* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), p. 70. Fogarty is here referring to the Germanic-language areas from the Low Countries to the Austrian Alps as 'Central Europe'.

Already prior to the setting up of the preparatory commissions, John XXIII had taken the unusual step of inviting all bishops to freely formulate the issues and concerns which they felt should be considered at the forthcoming event, following no particular format in the drafting of their notes. About 2,000 bishops heeded this call. At this early stage of the proceedings, the episcopacy was still, for the most part, in sleep mode, cowed into submission by Pius XII's iron grip during his *ventennio*. 'The majority of these writings demonstrated surprise and disorientation. Rome was not issuing orders, but was asking for suggestions!'¹⁰ With encouragement from the pope himself, before long the bishops' timidity and hesitations turned into proactive enthusiasm. The participant-observer and crucial player behind the scenes, Giuseppe Alberigo, continues: 'It was a gradual but rapid process, without any planning or management; the Council fathers were simply becoming aware of their role and of the vast and unforeseen horizons of the Council itself.'¹¹ The newly found self-confidence of the bishops meant that, at the end of the first (of four) council sessions, none of the schemata presented to them had been approved. The participants were in it for the long haul.

CONTRADICTIONARY PLURALISM

In assessing the milestones created by Vatican II, it is important to keep in mind that, not only did Vatican II experience the election of a new pope in mid-stream, which brought about a new configuration and a somewhat different dynamic to the procedures, but there is also the difficulty to determine what precisely are conciliar documents. Technically, of course, only documents approved by the entire body of council members are official contributions to the body of church doctrine by Vatican II. Yet, in the course of the three years of the various sessions, a host of other documents saw the light of day, notably papal encyclicals, such as John XXIII's testament of sorts, *Pacem in Terris*. Nominally not part of Vatican II procedures, the most important of such additional documents made public during the years of the council—and during the more than two years of the preparatory period—crucially influenced council procedures and attitudes. One should, moreover, note that such papal encyclicals were often more uncompromising and 'radical' documents than straightforward council decrees, declarations, and constitutions, as a pope did not have to heed expert advice by others in the course of the encyclicals' formulation to the same extent as the makers of products of council debates constantly reformulated by various committees.

¹⁰ Alberigo, *Brief History*, p. 12.

¹¹ Alberigo, *Brief History*, p. 26.

In fact, council documents were invariably products of long-winded discussions, drafts, redrafts, and all sorts of negotiations, so that the final product was often a compromise solution, including hidden and not-so-hidden inbuilt contradictions that make interpretations of certain text passages difficult at best. Paul VI's tendency to go to greater lengths than John XXIII in order to soften the impact of the progressive majority's numerical preponderance at the council on the traditionalist and conservative minority further emphasizes the 'contradictory pluralism' which, in effect, in the end, often shaped the ultimate documents.¹² And literally the entire corpus of Vatican II documents was voted on and approved with Paul VI in the Holy See, rather than the less hesitant John XXIII! Small wonder that, in Giuseppe Alberigo's words: 'The Council as a whole, the Council majority, and the directive bodies coordinated by the majority gradually lost cohesion and efficiency. The sense that the body of bishops was the real main character of the Council, a sense that had been widespread during the first two periods, began to lose its intoxicating effect. What came to replace it, in addition to a greater sense of uneasiness, was a certain sense of fatigue.'¹³ Still, Vatican II became the keynote event in twentieth-century Catholic history not because of the sometimes acrimonious dissensions amongst church fathers or its compromise formulations, but more importantly because of its conclusions voted on and approved.

A NEW ECCLESIOLOGY

By all means some of the central contributions of Vatican II were its pronouncements on the new ecclesiology which was to guide the Catholic church. Fundamental differences over the nature and the constitution of the church had already formed the basis for heated debates in the course of the rise and decline of what I have termed the first wave of Left Catholicism from the 1930s

¹² Note the cogent discussion of the multiple factors playing a role in the formulation of council documents in Peter Hünemann, 'Redécouvrir le "texte" passé inaperçu. A propos de l'herméneutique du concile', in Melloni and Theobald (eds), *Vatican II*, pp. 251–4. A brilliant guide towards an interpretation of key texts of official church doctrine, above all the documents emanating from Vatican II, can be consulted with much profit in the section entitled, 'Exkurs. Regeln zur Interpretation kirchenamtlicher Texte—und insbesondere des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils', in Otto Hermann Pesch, *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil (1962–1965). Vorgeschichte—Verlauf—Ergebnisse—Nachgeschichte* (Würzburg: Echter, 1993), pp. 148–60.

¹³ Alberigo, *Brief History*, p. 90. The changing context and atmosphere of the later sessions are well described in Luis Antonio Gokim Tagle, 'The "Black Week" of Vatican II (November 14–21, 1964)', in Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (eds), *History of Vatican II*, Vol. IV: *Church as Communion. Third Period and Intersession (September 1964–September 1965)* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003), pp. 386–452, a week during which various tensions came to a head.

to the 1950s.¹⁴ What happened at Vatican II is that, to a significant extent, the demands and expectations aired by this earlier generation of Catholic reformers now became official doctrine of the church. Discussions and negotiations surrounding various drafts and redrafts of what eventually became the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (*Lumen Gentium* (LG)) took up a significant percentage of the council sessions. For it was, in fact, clear from the very beginning that the relevant texts presented by the preparatory commission were too timid to express majority opinion on this topic at the council. And a variety of alternative projects soon superseded the quickly abandoned original scheme.

Given several crucial interventions by John XXIII and Paul VI allowing bishops greater freedom to move within council deliberations, and given the fact that bishops—along with their theologian consultants—were the prime immediate beneficiaries of the new winds blowing at the Vatican, it comes as little surprise that some of the most innovative passages of *Lumen Gentium* concern the role of bishops within the newly defined church. LG 27 stipulated, for instance, in its opening passage that bishops are to be regarded as ‘vicars and ambassadors of Christ’, and that they should not be regarded as ‘the vicars of the Roman pontiff, for they exercise an authority that is proper to them, and are quite correctly called “prelates”, heads of the people whom they govern’. LG 22 had already prepared the terrain by stressing the importance of the principle of collegiality and the desirability of the creation of episcopal conferences to formulate policy, thereby suggesting that the episcopacy should have important powers returned to them which, over the past centuries, Rome had removed. And LG 22 also stipulated that bishops have ‘supreme and full power over the universal Church, provided we understand this body together with its head the Roman Pontiff and never without this head.’ Finally, in this select highlighting of the free space Vatican II was attempting to carve out for the episcopacy, LG 23 underscores that dioceses are ‘particular churches’ which already carry within themselves the essence of the universal church rather than constituting ever so many constituent parts of the church, with each diocese by itself lacking what it takes to be considered the church.

Yet it is also true that *Lumen Gentium* already carried within itself important qualifiers and latent contradictions. On the one hand *Lumen Gentium* includes formulations which clearly widened the space for autonomous manoeuvres by the episcopacy. And on 15 September 1965, Paul VI went yet one step further and indeed established a world council of bishops by his *motu proprio Apostolica Sollicitudo*. Yet this act fell short of a true emancipation of the episcopacy, as the pope retained the exclusive right to convoke the synod,

¹⁴ See Horn, *Western European Liberation Theology*, *passim*.

to set its agenda, and to determine the remit of such synods.¹⁵ And thus the discussion surrounding episcopal rights and liberties within the hierarchical constitution of the church showcased both the promises and the limitations evoked and set by Vatican II.¹⁶

If even the episcopacy could not legislate its own unequivocal emancipation within the upper rungs of the hierarchy, somewhat less was to be expected for the various members of the church on lower levels. True to form, on the one hand Chapter IV of *Lumen Gentium*, addressing the role of the laity, and the conciliar Decree on the Lay Apostolate, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, certainly included important improvements in the role and status of laypersons in the church, which led Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimmler, in their commentary on the corpus of documents approved by Vatican II, to suggest that to continue 'to keep down and to disenfranchise the laity within the church' must henceforth be regarded as an impossible path to pursue.¹⁷ But, certainly in hindsight, the following prescient observation by Giuseppe Dossetti less than one year after the closure of Vatican II turns out to have been more appropriate. The Italian *éminence grise* of progressive Catholicism noted in his reflections that the entire range of council documents dealing with the role and status of laypersons turns out to have been 'particularly deficient and that, for all practical purposes, it has not marked much progress with respect to the very first preparatory schemes'.¹⁸

On the whole, however, *Lumen Gentium* is a milestone in the direction of greater autonomy for subordinate elements in the church's hierarchy, despite the fact that often the second half of a sentence partially rescinds the gains announced in the sentence's opening passage. In fact, the diplomatic manoeuvres surrounding the making of *Lumen Gentium*, including the wording of the final product, are an excellent example of the frequent observation by participant-observers that, quite often, the official documents emanating from the council, when placed under close textual scrutiny, fall short of the

¹⁵ See the discussion of the *motu proprio* in Gilles Routhier, 'Finishing the Work Begun. The Trying Experience of the Fourth Period', in Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (eds), *History of Vatican II*, Vol. V: *The Council and the Transition. The Fourth Period and the End of the Council. September 1965–December 1965* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), pp. 55–61.

¹⁶ A number of contributions to the five-volume history of the Second Vatican Council edited by Alberigo and Komonchak include vital information on aspects of the fashioning of *Lumen Gentium*. Of particular detail is Alberto Melloni, 'The Beginning of the Second Period: The Great Debate on the Church', in Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (eds), *History of Vatican II*, Vol. III: *The Mature Council. Second Period and Intersession. September 1963–September 1964* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000), pp. 1–115.

¹⁷ Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimmler, 'Einleitung', in Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimmler (eds), *Kleines Konzilskompendium. Alle Konstitutionen, Dekrete und Erklärungen des Zweiten Vaticanums in der bischöflich genehmigten Übersetzung* (Freiburg: Herder, 1966), p. 117.

¹⁸ Giuseppe Dossetti, *Il Vaticano II. Frammenti di una riflessione* (Bologna: Mulino, 1996), p. 48.

proverbial ‘spirit of Vatican II’. The Galician theologian Andrès Torres Queiroga put it like this: ‘The extraordinary meaning of the Council far surpasses the actual letters of its texts which do not convey the true significance which animates them except when one places them in the context of the Council’s grand design.’¹⁹ And the ubiquitous Giuseppe Alberigo pointed out yet another rather important aspect of Vatican II, which has often been overlooked in the relevant literature, and which should be mentioned in this particular context. Whereas in the official council deliberations most of the bishops present played a rather passive role, the atmosphere in ‘Off-Vatican’ Rome presented a rather more lively picture. A constant flow of ‘presentations, workshops, episcopal assemblies, informal conversations in cafés or inside buses during travel’ to and from various venues contributed their own fair share to the fashioning of a positive view of the overall meaning of council deliberations by sympathizers of the progressive council majority.²⁰ It was at least in part due to this atmosphere surrounding the four sessions that the council deliberations were regarded by many as an open-ended and hopeful experience. Thus, despite the contradictory pluralism of quite a number of key text passages, what entered collective memory as the event of Vatican II was a perception of council procedures which did not always mesh with the reality of sometimes tense discussions in the corridors of power.

There was one aspect of the drafting of *Lumen Gentium* which symbolically captures the much invoked joyful and progressive ‘spirit of Vatican II’. In October 1963, one year before the final approval of *Lumen Gentium*, the draft document on the constitution of the church, then still referred to as *De Ecclesia*, underwent an important change in the sequence of its chapters. Chapter 1 remained a reflection on the nature of the church, itself quite significant in part because, in its final passages, it is stressed that ‘the Church encompasses with love all who are afflicted with human suffering, and in the poor and afflicted sees the image of its poor and suffering Founder’ (LG 8). Yet the real novelty consisted in the reshuffling of Chapters 2 and 3. The original second chapter, which focused on the ecclesiastical hierarchy, was moved to Chapter 3. And the former third chapter, a discussion of the church as the People of God, now moved up to second place. The articles of what became Chapter 2 highlighted that all members of the church, via the act of baptism, were equal and united and thus form together the People of God. To place this enlightened discussion of the People of God prior to the disquisition on the hierarchy was a symbol-laden act and was understood as such on all sides of

¹⁹ Andrès Torres Queiroga, ‘Vatican II et sa théologie’, in Melloni and Theobald (eds), *Vatican II*, p. 35.

²⁰ Giuseppe Alberigo, ‘Vatican II et son histoire’, in Melloni and Theobald (eds), *Vatican II*, p. 49.

the debate. 'The very succession of topics would demonstrate their decreasing theological importance.'²¹

THE ROAD TO *GAUDIUM ET SPES*

Compared to *Lumen Gentium*, the second major council document, the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)* reads more straightforwardly, and its message thus comes across in less equivocal terms. Unlike most other council documents, it is almost entirely a product of the council deliberations themselves. For the preparatory commissions had never even attempted to address the relationship of the church to the world in one coherent schema. Comments on this—hitherto in church history—uneasy relationship had been interspersed within various schemata in an unorganized fashion.

Both *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes* can be traced back to the 20 October 1962 'Message to the World', officially proclaimed by the council on the tenth day of its first session. It had been drafted out of a growing sense of episcopal 'dissatisfaction with the schema drafted by the preconconciliar commissions and from a determination to correct its direction'. In other words, it was a reflection of the bishops' rapidly growing self-awareness and their wish to have the progressive council majority determine the agenda of Vatican II, rather than the traditionalist minority entrenched in the bulwark of the Roman curia. Andrea Riccardi succinctly describes the message's content: 'This rather short text moves on two levels: one focused on the self-presentation of the Church and its mission, the second on showing the world the solidarity of Catholicism in regard to the great problems of the age.'²² The first theme eventually mutated into *Lumen Gentium*, the second became *Gaudium et Spes*.

To place *Gaudium et Spes* in a larger context, brief mention must be made of what was perhaps the most important papal encyclical in the years of Vatican II. For the 11 April 1963 encyclical of John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, was a remarkable and astounding document in more ways than one. It was the first encyclical to be addressed to all of humanity—and not just to the members of the Catholic church. It broke with an age-old theological tradition by denying that there could be any such thing as a just war, certainly now in the atomic age. And *Pacem in Terris* for the first time proclaimed that human beings are invested with inalienable rights that are absolute values unassailable

²¹ Alberigo, *Brief History*, p. 49.

²² Both citations in this paragraph are from Andrea Riccardi, 'The Tumultuous Opening Day of the Council', in Alberigo and Komonchak (eds), *Vatican II*, Vol. II, p. 53 and p. 50.

by any authority.²³ But what is *Pacem in Terris*'s most important contribution in the context of the genesis of *Gaudium et Spes* is its repeated recourse to 'the signs of the times' as measures and tools with which to comprehend the reality of a constantly changing world. The innovation of this approach lies in its implied recommendation to study in all seriousness contemporary reality and society in order to determine in which way the values of the Gospel have materialized in today's world. Rather than relying on pre-established and traditional doctrine to judge present-day reality, Catholic believers are enjoined to place trust in investigatory methods that could be described as sociological, historical, and anthropological, before making value judgements on the phenomena of today's world.²⁴ And it is certainly in large part due to such methodological insights that *Pacem in Terris* was able to astound the world with its innovative insights and recommendations.

Perhaps Giovanni Turbanti puts it best when he points to the crucial impulses given by *Pacem in Terris* to subsequent deliberations in the making of *Gaudium et Spes*. For it openly encouraged efforts 'to observe in history and in the world the positive moments', rather than to view the world and humanity as primarily the source of most evils. 'This theological position implied a fundamental choice for an optimistic perspective, in sharp contrast to the negative vision which had characterized a large portion of theology and Catholic culture in prior decades.' Unsurprisingly, but importantly, such a novel vision also led to innovative conclusions. Rather than stressing the centrality of the gap dividing the contemporary world as being the opposition between communism and capitalism, the less blinkered assessment of *Pacem in Terris* would thus conclude that the world was divided into rich and poor.²⁵ *Pacem in Terris* was certainly the most explicit document in which John XXIII made use of such a historical and sociological method which had fallen into disuse within official circles of the Catholic church for quite some time.

In some respects, of course, this methodological approach is not all that far removed from what Alberto Melloni regards as the red thread behind John XXIII's personal and theological itinerary: Giuseppe Roncalli's distinct penchant to rely far more on close readings of the Bible than on various doctrinal 'traditions' established in subsequent centuries by the church.²⁶ In that sense, John XXIII echoed some central preoccupations of earlier reform theologians, who had engaged in a generational quest 'to return to the sources'.

²³ This last point is particularly stressed by Alberto Melloni, *Pacem in Terris. Storia dell'ultima enciclica di Papa Giovanni* (Bari: Laterza, 2010), pp. 69–70.

²⁴ A classic restatement of this social scientific method is presented by Marie-Dominique Chenu, *La Doctrine sociale de l'Église comme idéologie* (Paris: Cerf, 1979), pp. 64–5.

²⁵ Turbanti, 'Vatican II et son monde', citations on pp. 64 and 65.

²⁶ Alberto Melloni, *Papa Giovanni. Un cristiano e il suo concilio* (Turin: Einaudi, 2009), pp. 118–26.

GAUDIUM ET SPES

Gaudium et Spes (GS), Peter Hünemann suggests, was a document *sui generis*: 'Unlike previous treatises on ecclesiology, this document was to deal not with hierarchical structures and the prerogatives characteristic of the Church, but rather with the relationship of the Church to the people of the present age.'²⁷ Heeding the signs of the times, *Gaudium et Spes* became a sign of the times in its own right. For it is a commonplace in the literature on *Gaudium et Spes* to stress the fact that, in virtually all subsequent, post-conciliar debates within the Catholic church, the roots of the issues at hand were topics broached already in *Gaudium et Spes*. Or, to cite a Dutch theologian: '*Gaudium et Spes*, the pastoral constitution on the Church in the World of today, is *the* document of the Second Vatican Council.'²⁸

'The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ' (GS 1). The opening sentence of *Gaudium et Spes*'s preamble already clearly points in the direction in which the church fathers were headed with this pastoral constitution. The document then quickly got to the point by stating in unequivocal terms that 'the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel'. Whether the church had always actually conformed to such an attitude was tactfully left unaddressed. The church fathers at Vatican II were more concerned with present-day realities and the future of the church—as well as the world. Article 4 continued: 'We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings and its often dramatic characteristics. Some of the main features of the modern world can be sketched as follows' (GS 4).

This is not the time and place to reconstruct the concrete sequence of arguments chosen by the drafters of *Gaudium et Spes*.²⁹ What is crucial, however, is to highlight the anthropocentrism of this document, as well as its consistent orientation towards an analysis and assessment of the most burning questions facing the modern world today. One echo of this—for conservative Catholic theologians—rather non-traditional approach can be easily detected in the structure of the document itself. In the first part of the constitution, entitled 'The Church and Man's Calling', in fact, despite its title, the relevant chapter on the church, 'The Role of the Church in the

²⁷ Peter Hünemann, 'The Final Weeks of the Council', in Alberigo and Komonchak (eds), *History of Vatican II*, Vol. V, pp. 422–3.

²⁸ Erik Borgman, 'Gaudium et Spes, les perspectives oubliées d'un document révolutionnaire', in Melloni and Theobald (eds), *Vatican II*, p. 105; emphasis in the original.

²⁹ The definitive work on the drafting process of the pastoral constitution will remain for quite some time Giovanni Turbanti, *Un concilio per il mondo moderno. La redazione della costituzione pastorale 'Gaudium et Spes' del Vaticano II* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2000).

Modern World', stands in fourth (and last!) place in this section. Chapter 1, 'The Dignity of the Human Person', Chapter 2, 'The Community of Mankind', and Chapter 3, 'Man's Activity Throughout the World', take preference in this document. And even within each individual chapter, each theme is first addressed in general terms as well as judged in terms of its consequences in ways that could speak to all human beings, before finally being given an interpretation in light of church teachings.³⁰

Two specific elements of *Gaudium et Spes* should be highlighted in order to grasp the full importance and novelty of this pastoral constitution. One pertains to the questions of war and peace, which were then, in the early-to-mid-1960s, in the wake of the Cuba Crisis and the rapidly quickening nuclear arms race, uppermost on people's minds. Though somewhat less clear-cut in its pacifist orientation than John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris*, *Gaudium et Spes* nonetheless contains strident condemnations of warfare in the modern age, and it refused to countenance the invocation of standard military procedures demanding unconditional obedience by subordinates and, another novelty for a conciliar document, it instead included a rousing praise and defence of soldiers who refuse to follow immoral orders:

Even though recent wars have wrought physical and moral havoc on the world, the devastation of battles still goes on day by day in some part of the world. [...] Contemplating this melancholy state of humanity, the council wishes, above all things else, to recall the permanent binding force of universal natural law and its all-embracing principles. Man's conscience itself gives ever more emphatic voice to these principles. Therefore, actions which deliberately conflict with these same principles, as well as orders commanding such actions, are criminal, and blind obedience cannot excuse those who yield to them. [...] The courage of those who fearlessly and openly resist those who issue such commands merits supreme commendation. (GS 79)

Another trail-blazing argument central to *Gaudium et Spes* pertains to a matter which traditionally has been regarded as the social teaching of the church, in other words the questions of social inequality in the modern age, largely brought to the forefront during the industrial revolution in the course of the nineteenth century. *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) had set first benchmarks in slowly coming to terms with the conflictual relationship between capital and labour. As in so many other things, it was 'the Christian Pope', John XXIII, who finally expanded the boundaries of official church doctrine in this respect beyond what Leo XIII and Pius XI had dared to say. His encyclical *Mater et Magistra* (1961), but also to some extent certain passages in *Pacem in Terris*, proclaimed the need to strengthen workers' rights

³⁰ On this, I follow the argument put forth by Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimmler in their 'Einleitung' to *Gaudium et Spes* in their *Kleines Konzilskompendium*, p. 427.

as well as the need for increasing the remit of organizations set up to collectively defend the rights of labour. Nonetheless, *Gaudium et Spes* broke further new ground in this respect.

Article 67, the first specific mention of labour and of workers in the constitution, already established the atmosphere within which the ensuing articles of the subsection, 'Certain Principles Governing Socio-Economic Life as a Whole', must be seen. It opened with an unequivocal statement highlighting that, in the conflictual relationship between capital and labour, the council's sympathies lie on the side of the weak: 'Human labour which is expended in the production and exchange of goods or in the performance of economic services is superior to the other elements of economic life, for the latter have only the nature of tools' (GS 67). As Pius XI had already mentioned in *Quadragesimo Anno*, Article 68 of *Gaudium et Spes* noted: 'Amongst the basic rights of the human person is to be numbered the right of freely founding unions for working people', adding that strikes may 'remain in present-day circumstances a necessary, though ultimate, aid for the defence of the workers' own rights and the fulfilment of their just desires.'³¹

Yet *Gaudium et Spes* goes beyond *Quadragesimo Anno* in explicitly enlarging the terrain of fruitful activity for unions and other workers' associations in general, recommending 'the active sharing of all'³² in the administration and profits of their enterprises in ways to be determined', a conciliar stamp of approval for various schemes of co-determination and workers' participation in the running of their enterprises. Amazingly enough, *Gaudium et Spes* went even one step further: 'Since more often, however, decisions concerning economic and social conditions, on which the future lot of the workers and of their children depends, are made not within the business itself but by institutions on a higher level, the workers themselves should have a share also in determining these conditions—in person or through freely elected delegates' (GS 68).

If the articles on labour's rights were already refreshingly clear calls for an attenuation of the prevailing social order, *Gaudium et Spes* reserved its most explicit condemnation of the status quo for class relations in the Third World:

In many underdeveloped regions there are large or even extensive rural estates which are only slightly cultivated or lie completely idle for the sake of profit, while the majority of the people either are without land or have only very small fields, and, on the other hand, it is evidently urgent to increase the productivity of the fields. Not infrequently, those who are hired to work for the landowners or who till a portion of this land as tenants receive a wage or income unworthy of a human being, lack decent housing and are exploited by middlemen.

³¹ Rahner and Vorgrimmler add in their astute commentary: 'A right of lock-out for employers is not mentioned'; see Rahner and Vorgrimmler, *Kleines Konzilskompendium*, p. 440.

³² That is, in the words of the constitution, 'owners or employers, management or labour'.