PROCLAMATION AS DIALOGUE:
TRANSITION IN THE CHURCH–WORLD RELATIONSHIP

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Vatican II's Gaudium et spes *sees the church-world relationship in dialogical terms. This article argues that conceiving the church-world relationship as a dialogue is an important element in the council's recognition of what Charles Taylor calls the "modern social imaginary." The article defends the council's view of dialogue against the argument that contemporary Western views of dialogue are inherently relativist. It concludes by investigating the rich implications of this dialogical view for the church's primary task of proclamation.*

IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF Vatican II's *Gaudium et spes*, the concept of dialogue emerged as a means of expressing a new understanding of the Roman Catholic Church's relationship with the world.[1] Pope Paul VI was keen to ensure that the concept found a prominent place in the council's document on the church-world relationship.[2] The word "dia-

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[1] To date the finest study of the redactional process of *Gaudium et spes* is Giovanni Turbanti, *Un concilio per il mondo moderno: La redazione della costituzione pastorale "Gaudium et spes" del Vaticano II* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2000). Also essential for interpreting the document and its history is Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph Komonchak, eds., *History of Vatican II*, 5 vols. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995–2006).

[2] In his opening address to the second session of the council, Paul VI urged the bishops to conduct an open dialogue with the world ("Pope Paul VI to the Council," *Doctrine and Life* 13 [1963] 641–54, at 651–52). The following year he articulated a more comprehensive understanding of dialogue in the encyclical *Ecclesiam suam* (in *The Papal Encyclicals*, 5 vols., ed. Claudia Carlen [Wilmington, N.C.: McGrath, 1981] 5:135–60). In February 1965 during an

logue" occurs fewer times in the final text than in the drafts that imme-
diately preceded it; however, what in context are synonyms (such as
"conversation" and "communication") also appear in critical passages.[3]
Most importantly, the first half of the document, which is a sustained
discussion of the Church's relationship with the world, is structured
around the concept of dialogue.[4] In my reading of *Gaudium et spes*,
dialogue is the council's fundamental metaphor in interpreting the
church-world relationship.

Since the council, the concept of dialogue has found some expression in
the Church's official teaching.[5] Several theologians have also turned to this
notion when examining how the Church understands itself and its relation-

audience with Pierre Haubtmann, the final redactor of *Gaudium et spes*, Paul
VI asked how the final editorial work was proceeding and, according to
Ricardo Burigana and Giovanni Turbanti, made it clear that in the document,
"the inspiring principle should be dialogue, and the entire document ought to
be almost a continuation of the dialogue with the world that had begun in his
encyclical" ("The Intersession: Preparing the Conclusion of the Council," in
History of Vatican II 4:453–615, at 527. Here Burigana and Turbanti are
summarizing Haubtmann's notes).

[3] The theme of dialogue and the word itself gained greatest prominence in the
third chapter of the Zurich schema, which was first discussed on October 20, 1964,
at the council's third session (*Acta synodalia sacrosancti concilii oecumenici Vati-
cani II*, 5 vols. [Vatican City: Typis polyglottis Vaticanis, 1970–1978], vol. 3, pt. 5,
116–42, at 128–29). A significant section of chapter 3 (no. 18) is entitled "About
'dialogue' and its requirements" and discusses both the attitude of Christians to
dialogue with the world and Christian participation with others in forming organi-
zations for the good of the world.

[4] Turbanti argues that, despite both Paul VI's urging and the agreement of the
bishops, the theme of dialogue did not gain a significant place in the drafts of
the document after the Zurich schema. He argues that the theme of the signs of
the times replaced that of dialogue in interpreting the church-world relationship
from the Ariccia schema onward (Turbanti, *Un concilio per il mondo moderno*
805–7). Yet, in my view, this judgment disregards two significant realities. First,
that the first half of the final text—and particularly chapter four, entitled "The
Church's Task in Today's World"—is structured around the concept of dialogue.
And second, the theological themes of dialogue and the signs of the times are
closely interrelated. I have advanced these arguments more fully in "Church and
World at the Second Vatican Council: The Significance of *Gaudium et spes*,"
Pacifica 19 (2006) 37–57.

[5] On the Church's dialogue with other religions see John Paul II, *Redemptoris
missio: On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate* (1990).
John Paul II discusses dialogue within the Church itself in *Reconciliatio et paeni-
tentia* (1984). He deals with dialogue between Christian churches in *Ut unum sint*
(1995).

ship with the world.[6] Despite its significance in *Gaudium et spes*, however, this concept has not yet achieved widespread acceptance either in the practice of the Church's leadership or among theologians. It does not yet provide the background understanding or frame of reference within which all church leaders understand their task of proclaiming the gospel or within which theologians spell out the church-world relationship.

The primary aim of this article is to show that the concept of dialogue, richly conceived, can shed light on the Church's task of proclaiming the gospel today. The first section shows that the council's embrace of the notion of dialogue is an important element in its move away from a view of the church-world relationship that had held for almost a millennium but had become unworkable. My argument in this section and beyond is heavily indebted to Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor's evaluation of modernity.

In recent decades, several theologians have argued that the concept of dialogue is unsuitable for conceiving of the Church's relationship with the world because they believe that relativism has so strongly influenced Western culture that contemporary views of dialogue are intrinsically relativist. David Schindler, for example, discussing the notion of dialogue that he sees broadly at work in the United States, contends that "on a liberal understanding . . . dialogue cannot but be construed as an exchange that is first (logically) between discrete individuals, each of whom first (logically) constructs the truth for himself or herself."[7] This is a critical issue since, if a relativist understanding of dialogue dominated contemporary self-understanding, it would be difficult for the Church to envisage its fundamental task in dialogical terms. My second section examines these competing stances on the concept of dialogue.

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[6] See, e.g., Lieven Boeve, "Beyond the Modern–Anti-Modern Dilemma: *Gaudium et spes* and Theological Method in a Postmodern Context," *Horizons* 34 (2007) 295–305; "*Gaudium et spes* and the Crisis of Modernity: The End of the Dialogue with the World?" in *Vatican II and Its Legacy*, ed. M. Lamberigts and L. Kenis (Dudley, Mass.: Peeters, 2002) 83–94; Bradford E. Hinze, *Practices of Dialogue in the Roman Catholic Church: Aims and Obstacles, Lessons and Laments* (New York: Continuum, 2006); Mary Catherine Hilkert, "Dialogue, Proclamation, and the Sacramental Imagination," *Proceedings of the Annual Convention* (Catholic Theological Society of America) 61 (2006) 81–98; and Bruno Forte, "The Theological Foundations of Dialogue within the Framework of Cultures Marked by Unbelief and Religious Indifference," *Louvain Studies* 31 (2006) 3–18. For reflection on dialogue between the Church and other world religions see William R. Burrows, ed., *Redemption and Dialogue: Reading 'Redemptoris missio' and 'Dialogue and Proclamation'* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1994); and Michael Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine 8 (New York: Cambridge University, 2002).

[7] David L. Schindler, "On the Catholic Common Ground Project: The Christological Foundations of Dialogue," *Communio* 23 (1996) 823–51, at 834–35.

The third section argues that a dialogical view of the church-world relationship illumines the task of proclamation. By adopting the concept of dialogue articulated by Hans-Georg Gadamer and built upon by Charles Taylor, I contend that it can bring to light important dimensions of what is involved in proclaiming the gospel in this age.[8] The type of activity envisaged here is that of speech partners coming to an understanding by overcoming impediments to mutual comprehension. Furthermore, I argue that the dialogical model of proclamation applies not only to conversation between individual interlocutors, but also in wider settings, in which congregations, societies, or cultures are addressed.

My argument in section three is that a dialogical understanding of proclamation elucidates what is involved in embracing the gospel as the truth and can lead us to see why the act of proclamation must be a revelatory event for both proclaimers and addressees. Throughout, I use "proclamation" to encompass the broad range of activities involved in the Church's mission, as the term is used in Mark 16:15: "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation." My concluding paragraphs indicate why this broader meaning of proclamation better accounts for what takes place when the gospel is intelligently and faithfully proclaimed.

COMING TO GRIPS WITH A NEW SOCIAL IMAGINARY

Charles Taylor's recent study of the rise of Western modernity argues that we can best understand that development and the societies that emerged by clearly identifying the self-understandings that underpin them.[9] These self-understandings, Taylor suggests, are constitutive of the practices and institutions of the West today.[10] He names this background set of understandings a "social imaginary" and defines the term as follows:

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[8] See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1989) esp. 369–89; Charles Taylor, "Understanding the Other: A Gadamerian View on Conceptual Schemes," in *Gadamer's Century: Essays in Honor of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, ed. J. E. Malpas, Ulrich Arnswald, and Jens Kertscher, Studies in Contemporary German Thought (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 2002) 279–97.

[9] Taylor's most significant work on this question is *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University, 2004). He summarizes his argument in *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 2007) 159–211. See also Taylor, "On Social Imaginaries," in *Traversing the Imaginary: Richard Kearney and the Postmodern Challenge*, ed. Peter Gratton and John Panteleimon Manoussakis, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University, 2007) 29–47; and Taylor, "Modernity and Difference," in *Without Guarantees: In Honour of Stuart Hall*, ed. Paul Gilroy, Lawrence Grossberg, and Angela McRobbie (London: Verso, 2000) 364–74.

[10] Unlike many scholars, Taylor does not use the language of postmodernity for our age. He supports this stance on several fronts. First, as will be clear below, he

By social imaginary, I mean something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode. I am thinking, rather, of the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.[11]

A social imaginary, then, is not a theory, but the broad set of background understandings out of which a society functions. *Modern Social Imaginaries* is Taylor's account of the background and often unarticulated set of understandings that make sense of contemporary institutions and practices.

In this first strand of my argument, I want to show that, with the promulgation of *Gaudium et spes*, Vatican II finally recognized the social forms that constitute modernity and as a result reenvisaged the church-world relationship in dialogical terms. I will sketch the broad outline of Taylor's understanding of the modern social imaginary before showing how modern self-understandings were accepted in *Gaudium et spes*. The council's recognition of modern social forms cannot be interpreted as an uncritical embrace of modernity: *Gaudium et spes* offers strong challenges to the modern world. Yet it is in this new context that the move to a dialogical view of the church-world relationship can be best understood.

The cultural change that swept the West between the 16th and 19th centuries radically reshaped governments, economies, and whole societies. Prior to this, most premodern societies understood themselves as set in a hierarchical order that reflected the hierarchy in the cosmos.[12] Scholars have variously explored the shift into the modern period, but Taylor argues that at the heart of the modern worldview is an ethic at work, which he calls the order of mutual benefit. In his account of the modern moral order, individuals, who are now not embedded in a hierarchical order, come together and through the pursuit of their own legitimate individual goals serve to benefit the good of the whole.[13]

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thinks that the institutions and practices that arose in the 18th century and characterize modernity (the modern economy, the public sphere, and the self-governing people) still characterize our age. Second, he argues strongly against the stances of Nietzsche, Foucault, and Derrida. On this second issue see the following by Charles Taylor: *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1989) chaps. 4 and 25; "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, Philosophical Papers 2 (New York: Cambridge University, 1985) 152–84; and "The Immanent Counter-Enlightenment," in *Canadian Political Philosophy: Contemporary Reflections*, ed. Ronald Beiner and Wayne Norman (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University, 2001) 386–400.

[11] Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* 23.
[12] See ibid., chap. 1.
[13] See ibid. and Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 2002) 67.

Taylor sees this notion of the order of mutual benefit inflecting the whole development of the modern world, and finds it at work particularly in the three forms of social self-understanding that characterize modernity: the economy, the public sphere, and the practice of popular sovereignty. It is perhaps most obvious in the development of the modern economy, by which the activities of production and consumption are moved out of the control of authority figures in a hierarchical society to form a system that is self-regulating. Taylor describes the modern economy as "an interlocking set of activities of production, exchange and consumption, which form a system with its own laws and its own dynamic. Instead of being merely the management, by those in authority, of the resources we collectively need in household or state, the economic now defines a way we are linked together, a sphere of coexistence."[14]

A second aspect of the social life characterizing the modern era is the development of a public sphere independent of political authority. In a seminal work on the public sphere, Jürgen Habermas locates its origin in the 18th century with the development of a new concept of public opinion.[15] Books, pamphlets, and newspapers played a significant part in people's coming to a common understanding of the revolutionary events of 1789, enabling them, outside the usual operation of government, to discuss and form a common mind about items of mutual interest. Two elements are important in the operation of a modern public sphere: (1) it is a sphere of discussion open to all citizens and not circumscribed by locality;[16] and (2) it operates outside the realm of government, thus enabling citizens to reflect on the operation of government.[17] In summary, Taylor defines the public sphere as "a new metatopical space, in which members of society could exchange ideas and come to a common mind. As such it constituted a metatopical agency, but one that was understood to exist independent of the political constitution of society."[18]

Popular sovereignty is the third aspect that characterizes modern social life. Like the rise of the modern economy and the public sphere, the transition to popular sovereignty required a transformation in social imag-

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[14] Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* 76.
[15] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1989); Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1990). See Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* 84–85.
[16] Taylor (ibid. 86) calls this a metatopical space.
[17] Habermas names this element the principle of supervision; see Jürgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article," trans. Sarah Lennox and Frank Lennox, *New German Critique* 3 (1974) 49–55, cited in Warner, *Letters of the Republic* 41.
[18] Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* 99.

inary, i.e., a transformation of the background understanding of what it means to exist socially.[19] This transformation was a shift from society and government conceived of as hierarchically ordered since some primitive time to a society and government brought about through the action of the people. The path to popular sovereignty varied greatly in the American, French, and English cases and resulted in different forms and expressions. But in each case it involved "'inventing the people' as a new collective agency."[20]

Although the development of the modern social imaginary meant a shift away from a hierarchical conception of society, it was not motivated by a rejection of God. Some of the most influential theorists of the new social order saw that order as designed by God, with everything working together for God's purpose.[21] Indeed, Taylor shows that particularly in the American and British cases, the transformed notion of the self-governing people had Christian roots.[22] However, the shift from a hierarchical world-view opened the question of the grounding of our common action and allowed the possibility of nontheistic responses.

Barring a couple of brief exceptions, the Roman Catholic Church of the 19th century approached the emerging worldview from the perspective of the hierarchical understanding—often called the Christendom model—that had dominated the previous eight centuries. Arising in the middle of the 11th century, the intensified project of Christendom was a conscious effort to bring the whole of humanity under the law of Christ.[23] Taylor summarizes the central idea of the Christendom project as the attempt to foster "a civilization where the structures, institutions, and culture were all supposed to reflect the Christian nature of society."[24] Essential to its effectiveness was the church's strong relationship with the state. In the first

[19] See ibid., chap. 8.

[20] Taylor, ibid. 143. The quotation within the quotation is from E. S. Morgan, *Inventing the People* (New York: Norton, 1988).

[21] Taylor, "Closed World Structures," in *Religion after Metaphysics*, ed. Mark A. Wrathall (New York: Cambridge University, 2003) 47–68, at 63–64. See John Locke's "Second Treatise of Government," in Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (New York: Cambridge University, 1988).

[22] Taylor, "Closed World Structures" 63–64.

[23] Of course, the model of Christendom first appeared with Constantine, but Colin Morris argues that an intensified form of Christendom developed from the mid-eleventh century, powerfully influencing the European world. See Colin Morris, "Christian Civilization," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity*, ed. John McManners (Oxford: Oxford University, 1990) 196–232, at 199. Morris studies this period extensively in *The Papal Monarchy: The Western Church from 1050 to 1250*, Oxford History of the Christian Church (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989).

[24] Charles Taylor, "A Catholic Modernity?" in *A Catholic Modernity?: Charles Taylor's Marianist Award Lecture*, ed. James L. Heft (New York: Oxford University, 1999) 13–37, at 17.

three decades of the 19th century both the papacy and the French bishops attempted to rebuild this relationship after it had been shattered in the Revolution.

When the papacy concluded that rebuilding was not possible, it forcefully expressed its opposition to the emerging liberal culture in a series of encyclicals that set the Church's agenda for its relationship with the world well into the 20th century. Gregory XVI (1831–1846), Pius IX (1846–1878) and Leo XIII (1878–1903) each responded adversely to the changing culture, with even Leo's response being little more than a variation on the theme.[25] What immediately strikes the 21st-century reader of these documents is their pessimistic view of values that today are almost universally cherished in the West: democracy, equality, and human rights. Owen Chadwick describes Pius IX's view of his times as "an apocalyptic vision of criminals running through the world, ranting of liberty when they were slaves of corruption."[26] Yet to characterize these documents solely in reactionary terms is to misunderstand them. The view of the church-world relationship that had shaped the previous eight centuries endured in the 19th-century encyclicals, but in the new context the Church's leadership found itself in opposition to the surrounding culture.

In his 1864 encyclical, *Quanta cura*, Pius IX lamented the disintegration of the nexus between society and the Church. He believed that this breakdown would result in a disaster that only the restoration of the Church's directive role within the state could obviate. He described the threat in these terms:

[These] false and perverse opinions are . . . the more to be detested, because they chiefly tend to this, that that salutary influence be impeded and (even) removed, which the Catholic Church, according to the institution and command of her Divine Author, should freely exercise even to the end of the world—not only over private individuals, but over nations, peoples, and their sovereign princes; and (tend also) to take away that mutual fellowship and concord of counsels between Church and State which has ever proved itself propitious and salutary, both for religious and civil interests.[27]

With the hierarchical worldview in tatters, Pius IX was unable to imagine a place for the Church in the modern social imaginary.

It might seem that Leo XIII had put the vision of Christendom behind him: he wrote eight encyclicals on the Church's relationship with society, and from the second of these onward, he recognized democracy as a valid form of government.[28] But his recognition of democracy was not an admis-

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[25] On the papal response in the 19th century, see Owen Chadwick, *A History of the Popes 1830–1914*, Oxford History of the Christian Church (New York: Oxford University, 1998).

[26] Chadwick, *A History of the Popes* 175.

[27] Pius IX, *Quanta cura* no. 3, in *Papal Encyclicals* 1:381–85, at 382.

[28] Leo XIII, *Diuturnum* no. 6, in *Papal Encyclicals* 2:51–58, at 52.

sion that the nexus between government and the Church had been severed irrevocably. In his encyclical on the Christian constitution of states, *Immortale Dei* (1885), Leo argues that it was only because the Church had been established in the West that states were able to bear "fruits important beyond all expectation."[29] For Leo XIII, as for Gregory XVI and Pius IX, the evils of 19th-century societies could be remedied only if the authority of the Church was accepted by all.[30] Leo's recognition of democracy, while adhering to a belief in the Church's directive role in the state, is commonly referred to as his thesis/hypothesis distinction. Here the thesis is the ideal situation where Catholicism is recognized as the established true religion, and the hypothesis is a pragmatic compromise in a pluralist context.[31]

John Courtney Murray's detailed analysis of Leo's view of the church-state relationship shows that the pope's partial recognition of democracy as a valid form of government was facilitated by his appropriation of Thomist thought, and particularly the Thomistic distinction between the natural and the supernatural orders, with the natural order understood to be relatively independent.[32] On the other hand, Murray demonstrates that Leo's rejection of modernity was propelled by his polemical cast of mind. The pope understood issues of church and state within his special problematic, "the sectarian Liberal aggression against the historic integrity of the so-called Catholic nation."[33] For Leo, the separation of church and state was not simply a new social arrangement; it was, in Murray's words, "inextricably linked to the allegedly universal principles of sectarian Liberalism"[34]—individual conscience and popular sovereignty understood as a rejection of God. While the Vatican's struggles with the French and Italian leadership of the time would explain Leo's polemic, it leaves open the question of whether his special problematic accurately accounted for modernity. What is important for my purposes here is that Leo's partial acceptance of democracy does not represent a recognition of the modern social imaginary.

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[29] Leo XIII, *Immortale Dei* no. 21, in *Papal Encyclicals* 2:107–19, at 112.

[30] See Oskar Köhler, "The World Plan of Leo XIII: Goals and Methods," in *History of the Church*, 10 vols., ed. Hubert Jedin and John Dolan (New York: Crossroad, 1980) 9:3–25, at 21.

[31] See Paul E. Sigmund, "Catholicism and Liberal Democracy," in *Catholicism and Liberalism: Contributions to American Public Philosophy*, ed. R. Bruce Douglass and David Hollenbach (New York: Cambridge University, 1994) 217–41, at 222–23.

[32] John Courtney Murray, "Leo XIII and Pius XII: Government and the Order of Religion," in *Religious Liberty: Catholic Struggles with Pluralism*, ed. J. Leon Hooper, S.J., Library of Theological Ethics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993) 49–125.

[33] Ibid. 90.   [34] Ibid. 52.

In the light of subsequent history and of the Church's reflection since Vatican II, Pius IX's condemnation of democracy seems absurd. What gave it some semblance of credibility at the time, at least to those close to him, was that democracy and human rights were key elements of an understanding that shattered the hierarchical worldview within which the Roman Catholic Church understood itself.[35]

After almost two centuries of the Catholic Church's distancing itself from the emerging worldview, the bishops of Vatican II came to grips with it in the process of writing *Gaudium et spes*. Two tentative steps in this direction were taken a little earlier. Amid the devastation of Europe in World War II and the strength of fascist and socialist governments, Pius XII conceded in his 1944 Christmas message that "a democratic form of government appears to many people as the natural postulate imposed by reason itself."[36] John XXIII's 1963 encyclical, *Pacem in terris*, articulated a Christian understanding of human rights, with basic aspects being the right to take part in political life and the role of the state in protecting human rights. In addition, a number of 19th- and 20th-century Catholic intellectuals explored the relationship between the Christian faith and the emerging liberal culture.[37] One particularly influential voice was that of 20th-century French philosopher Jacques Maritain who argued for democracy on Thomistic grounds.[38]

Only in *Gaudium et spes*, however, did the leadership of the Church come to terms with the new worldview, a development that required the bishops to promote a new understanding of the Church's place in the world.[39] Characteristic of the change was the acknowledgement in *Gaudium et spes* of the three forms of social self-understanding constitutive of the modern social imaginary. First, the constitution acknowledges that the economy is a means of achieving the common good. Part 2 of the document, which deals with a range of contemporary social problems, states:

No less than other areas of social life, the modern economy is characterized by our growing mastery over nature, closer and more developed contacts and interdependence among citizens, groups and peoples, and more frequent political intervention. At the same time, advances in productivity and the exchange of goods and services

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[35] Chadwick discusses other factors that contributed to Pius's strident language; see *A History of the Popes* 168–81.

[36] Pope Pius XII, "1944 Christmas Message," in *The Pope Speaks: The Teachings of Pope Pius XII*, ed. Michael Chinigo (New York: Pantheon, 1957) 262–99.

[37] Pertinent here would be some essays in *Catholicism and Liberalism*.

[38] See Charles E. Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching, 1891–Present: A Historical, Theological, and Ethical Analysis*, Moral Traditions (Washington: Georgetown University, 2002) 154.

[39] The council's move beyond Christendom also involved its embrace of the principle of religious liberty in *Dignitatis humanae*, which backed away from the ideal of establishment.

have made the economy an effective instrument to make better provision for the increased needs of the human family.[40]

Yet in accepting the modern economy, the council did not embrace it uncritically; thus the document identifies a range of socioeconomic difficulties, including the increasing gap between rich and poor and the relationship between labor and capital. Principles are proposed to aid states in addressing these difficulties.

Second, *Gaudium et spes* unambiguously recognizes the value of popular sovereignty:

It is entirely in accord with human nature that political and juridical structures be devised which will increasingly and without discrimination provide all citizens with the genuine opportunity of taking a free and active share in establishing the juridical foundations of the political community, in determining the form of government and the functions and purposes of its various institutions, and in the election of the government. (*GS* no. 75)

The council recognized that democracy has profoundly transformed societies for the good: it has grown from a deep awareness of human dignity and better protects the rights of the person especially in public life than did the regimes it succeeded. Such recognition of popular sovereignty can only mean that church and government operate in separate spheres, independently of each other. In the council's words: "By virtue of its commission and competence the church is not identified in any way with political society or bound to any political system" (*GS* no. 76). These words unequivocally express a move away from the Church's directive role in the state that the papacy had advocated throughout the 19th century.

While popular sovereignty and the modern economy are extensively discussed in *Gaudium et spes*, the third element of the modern social imaginary, namely, the public sphere, does not receive a detailed analysis. Nonetheless its operation is assumed. The growing significance of the media in contemporary culture is noted (*GS* no. 6), and the role that citizens play in the development of culture is discussed. Citizens are "the architects and authors of the culture of their own community" (*GS* no. 55), the document states, and this responsibility includes believers, who are called to "collaborate with all others in building a world of more human construction" (*GS* no. 57).

In summary, through the promulgation of *Gaudium et spes* the Church abandoned its attachment to the worldview of Christendom, including its once privileged relationship to the state. What had changed, however, was

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[40] Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes*, in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Council*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, 2 vols. (Washington: Georgetown University, 1990) no. 63. Subsequent references to *Gaudium et spes* (*GS*) will be placed in parentheses in the text.

far more than relationships of power: no longer was it possible to appeal meaningfully to the hierarchical worldview as the commonly accepted social imaginary. Vatican II's recognition of the forms of social self-understanding at work in modernity is not a minor alteration to previous understandings; it is a shift in worldview. For that reason I believe that the worldview articulated in *Gaudium et spes* can best be understood as the council's coming to grips with a new social imaginary. *Gaudium et spes* makes no attempt to cling to, and much less retrieve, the hierarchical worldview of Christendom.

It was abundantly clear that Vatican II's acceptance of the modern social imaginary meant that the church-world relationship would have to be comprehensively reenvisaged. As government, the economy, and the public sphere are independent of the church, a directive role for the Roman Catholic Church is not possible. Rather, since these three forms of modern social self-understanding are all spheres in which individuals come together to organize their social lives, it is in these terms that the Church would have to find its place in the world. Having set aside coercive power, the Church in contemporary society would have to invitingly engage with individuals in order to proclaim the gospel and allow it to bear fruit.

It is this relationship, encapsulated in the word "dialogue," that is envisaged in *Gaudium et spes*. Part 1, an extended reflection on the church-world relationship, concludes with a chapter (four) governed by the concept of dialogue. Here, the council sees the Church contributing to both individuals and whole societies. Recognizing that individuals are searching to make sense of existence, the council finds the Church instrumental in this search: it is "entrusted with making manifest the mystery of God, who is our ultimate goal, [and] at the same time it discloses to us the meaning of our existence, or the intimate truth about ourselves" (*GS* no. 41). The council also sees the Church making a substantial contribution to a dialogue with society, saying that the Church's "mission of a religious nature produces a function, enlightenment and resources which can be of service in constructing and strengthening the human community" (*GS* no. 42). Yet a dialogue is two-way, and with this in mind the council states, first, that the Church has received much from the world, "from the history and development of the human race" (*GS* no. 44). Because of what the Church has received, the council then teaches that the believing community must constantly keep itself open to the world in order that it may hear to what it is called:

It is for God's people as a whole, with the help of the holy Spirit, and especially for pastors and theologians, to listen to the various voices of our day, discerning them and interpreting them, and to evaluate them in the light of the divine word, so that the revealed truth can be increasingly appropriated, better understood and more suitably expressed. (*GS* no. 44)

Such openness to the various languages of the day will enable the Church to faithfully proclaim the message of the gospel in each culture. "This adaptation in preaching the revealed word," the council declares, "should remain the law of all evangelization" (*GS* no. 44). In sum, the type of dialogue envisaged in *Gaudium et spes* could be put in these terms: the Church, founded in the gospel, responds to the desires and struggles of this age, while listening for the voice of the Spirit in the world.

The theme of dialogue is recapitulated in the conclusion of *Gaudium et spes*: "In virtue of its mission to spread the light of the gospel's message over the entire globe, and to bring all people of whatever nation, race or culture together into the one Spirit, the church comes to be a sign of that kinship which makes genuine dialogue possible and vigorous" (*GS* no. 92). The paragraph continues with a discussion about dialogue within the Church, in ecumenical settings, and among all who believe in God:

The wish for such conversations, undertaken solely out of love for the truth and with all due prudence, excludes nobody. . . . Since God our Father is the origin and destiny of all things, we are all called to be sisters and brothers. Therefore, in our common human and divine vocation we can and should work together without violence and deceit, and in true peace, to build the world. (*GS* no. 92)

DIALOGUE CONTESTED

Speaking of the church-world relationship in terms of dialogue has strong appeal today since the notion of dialogue emphasizes the personal agency of individuals as they strive to make sense of their lives. If the journey of the believer did not involve an ongoing process of personal appropriation through exploration and questioning, one would wonder whether the result could be called faith in any worthwhile sense. This understanding of the personal journey of faith has implications for the Church's conception of its task of proclamation: the Church's proclamation of the gospel must engage with the self-understanding of individuals, aiming to persuade minds and hearts.[41] It is hardly surprising, then, in a culture in which personal agency is so highly prized, that *Gaudium et spes* adopted the concept of dialogue as a means of articulating the church-world relationship.

There is a further reason for dialogue being an appropriate concept with which to understand the Church's role of proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the earth. From its earliest days the Christian community has spoken about Jesus of Nazareth as the Word of God addressed to humanity.

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[41] In my third section I will show that proclamation in wider settings—to a congregation, society, or culture—also requires the Church to engage with the worldview (including what Taylor calls the social imaginary) of the addressees.

We find the strongest identification of Christ with the word of God in the prologue of John's Gospel: "the Word became flesh and lived among us" (1:14). In both the Synoptic Gospels and the Pauline writings, when the apostles proclaim the word, they see themselves as not simply conveying sound teaching, but as revealing the mystery of Christ.[42] Christ, the Word, is present in the proclaimed word. In this central Christian doctrine, it is understood that those to whom the word is addressed are capable of hearing it, and that God is revealed through the subjective act of hearing, although it is always acknowledged that the capacity to hear is itself a gift—the gift of faith.[43] When the revelation of God is understood in this way, humans are seen as interlocutors who listen and respond to God's word. Conceiving the church-world relationship in terms of dialogue brings this rich theological heritage to the fore.

From the perspective of several contemporary theologians, however, the very popularity of the notion of dialogue makes it problematic as a means of accounting for the church-world relationship. Although not denying that the concept of dialogue is of some use in this context, these theologians argue that its common usage has severely curtailed its capacity to express the rich relationship that the Church wants with the world. In their view, the understanding with which *Gaudium et spes* concludes—dialogue "undertaken solely out of love for the truth" (*GS* no. 92)—differs greatly from the notion of dialogue widely assumed in the West today.

In a brief essay entitled "Dialogue, Truth, and Communion,"[44] Avery Dulles argues that there is an intrinsic relationship between dialogue and truth in the notions of dialogue that shaped our past. However, he continues, the model of dialogue dominant in the West today prescinds from questions of truth. In what he names the classical model (encompassing the work of Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and others) the purpose of dialogue is to allow the truth to prevail. In the personalist model, which Dulles associates particularly with Martin Buber, people engage in dialogue to learn from one another and arrive at an understanding of the truth beyond their previous horizons. Yet, Dulles argues, in the liberal model extant in the West today, it is assumed that all people engaging in dialogue have the

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[42] Leo Scheffczyk, "Word of God," in *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner (New York: Seabury, 1975) 1821–27, at 1822.

[43] See Karl Rahner, "Word of God and Theology," in *Encyclopedia of Theology* 1827–29.

[44] Avery Dulles, *Dialogue, Truth, and Communion*, Catholic Common Ground Initiative (New York: National Pastoral Life Center, 2001). Dulles also discusses the difficulties of dialogue since the council in his November 1996 McGinley lecture. See "The Travails of Dialogue," in *Church and Society: The Laurence J. McGinley Lectures, 1988–2007* (New York: Fordham University, 2008) 221–33.

right to define their lives on their own terms. In this view, then, dialogue does not aim to bring partners to a common mind but rather aims to create a tolerant society. After surveying Catholic teaching on dialogue since the 1960s, Dulles argues that because truth is acknowledged as the norm and goal of dialogue in the classical and personalist approaches, these offer a more appropriate understanding for the Church's dialogue intramurally, in ecumenical and interfaith settings, and with the world.

In a more sustained discussion of the concept of dialogue in Roman Catholic theology, David Schindler's primary concern is also the effect of liberal understandings of the self and society (what he terms American liberalism) on Catholic views of dialogue.[45] Responding to a statement by the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin on the Catholic Common Ground Project, Schindler criticizes what he believes is the notion of dialogue assumed in that statement. My interest here is not in the specific issue of Bernardin's statement, but in the disagreement about what is taken to be dialogue. Schindler contends that in contemporary America, dialogue and truth are assumed to exist in inverse relationship: that open dialogue requires participants to set aside metaphysical or religious commitments.[46] With substantive commitments off the agenda, dialogue becomes the purely procedural or formal exercise of establishing an arrangement with which all parties can live.

For Schindler, this procedural understanding does not do justice to what takes place in dialogue, particularly within the Church.[47] As I noted above, the person of Jesus Christ—God's Word spoken to humanity—is central to a Christian understanding of dialogue. Dialogue within the Church, and between the Church and the world, is necessarily related to Christ's life as revelatory of both God and of what it is to be fully human. Dialogue leads believers into the mystery of his life, expressed in the community of the Church. In Schindler's words, "The fundamental mission of every

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[45] Schindler, "Christological Foundations of Dialogue."

[46] The most celebrated articulation of this stance is that of John Rawls, who argues that although citizens may find it hard to conceive of themselves "apart from certain religious, philosophical, and moral commitments, or from certain enduring attachments and loyalties," these commitments should be bracketed for political purposes. He argues that in liberal societies we cannot hope to agree on such controversial issues and by bracketing them we ensure that the institutional life of society remains free from controversy. See John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University, 1993) 31. A fine rebuttal of Rawls's argument is found in Michael J. Sandel, "Political Liberalism," in *Public Philosophy: Essays on Morality in Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 2005) 211–47.

[47] Schindler's immediate concern in this article is dialogue within the Roman Catholic Church, but in a later article he points out the significance of his argument for the Church's dialogue with the world ("Institution and Charism: The Missions of the Son and the Spirit in Church and World," *Communio* 25 [1998] 253–73).

Christian . . . is to enter this dialogue which God has initiated with every creature in Jesus Christ."[48] For Schindler, then, procedural views negate a crucial aspect of dialogue: they do not allow dialogue partners to engage in serious exchange about the substantive or ontological positions on which their views rest. He argues further that for believers engaged in dialogue with each other or with the world, it is not enough simply to acknowledge the truth claims of Christianity; these truth claims must be understood as the ground of dialogue—dialogue leads believers into a deeper understanding of the truth.

Dulles and Schindler are on to something when they point out the influence of liberal culture on concepts of dialogue.[49] The issue they identify seems pervasive. It is not uncommon, when engaged in spirited conversation about a difficult matter, to be nonplussed by the response, "well, that may be your truth but it's not mine"—as if that retort is the best possible explanation for the differing perspectives. That response, taken seriously, implies that subjectivity is the ultimate arbiter of truth. But at least from the perspectives of Dulles and Schindler that stance cannot hold for Christians, because they see the world as created and understand their lives in relationship to Jesus of Nazareth. When all reality comes into existence as God's gift, and God is most clearly revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, entirely relativist understandings of reality are untenable.

The difficulty that Dulles and Schindler raise for the dialogical view of the church-world relationship that I am proposing arises from the effect of relativism on Western culture. They would not, I believe, be convinced by the suggestion that it is possible for believers to adopt an understanding of dialogue untainted by relativism, or even that many believers do have such an understanding. Theirs is the stronger point that relativism has affected the West so radically, that the type of dialogue with the world required today by proclamation is not possible. It is that line of reasoning that must be discussed.

There seems no doubt that relativist or subjectivist understandings play a part in liberal culture. But what part? How can their influence be best understood? This is a critical question, since, if liberal culture is built upon subjectivist assumptions, Dulles and Schindler must reject it outright and understand the Christian tradition to be in opposition to it. But if the subjectivist thread of liberal culture is, rather, a series of corrupted forms of a commendable moral ideal, or even if it is one thread of contemporary

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[48] Schindler, "Christological Foundations of Dialogue" 829.
[49] I am using the term "liberal culture" to refer to those cultures largely shaped by the Enlightenment and the revolutions of the 18th century—broadly, the North Atlantic world, Australia, and New Zealand.

self-understanding among others, this would call for a different view of both the culture and its relationship with the gospel.

In his extensive study of the modern identity, Charles Taylor identifies two strands of a slide toward subjectivism in the West.[50] First, at the level of popular culture, Taylor sees a slide toward self-centered forms of what he calls the ethic of authenticity. Second, he sees this slide in popular culture strengthened by a subjectivist turn in the thought of Nietzsche and a group of influential 20th-century thinkers whom Nietzsche inspired, particularly Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault.

One of the primary tasks that Taylor undertakes in *Sources of the Self* is to trace the connections between contemporary senses of the self and moral visions, that is, between identity and the good. These moral visions are often obscured in contemporary moral and political theory, but he argues that we cannot make sense of the modern identity outside its relationship to moral sources. In his Massey lectures (1991), published outside Canada as *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Taylor explores one understanding of the self dominant today—the ethic of authenticity. He maintains that this ethic is particular to modernity and has roots both in Enlightenment thought, influenced by Descartes and Locke, and also in Romanticism influenced by writers such as Rousseau. What characterizes this moral ideal is the conviction that "there is a certain way of being human that is *my* way. I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of anyone else's. But this understanding gives a new importance to being true to myself. If I am not, I miss the point of my life, I miss what being human is for *me*."[51] This is certainly a commendable moral ideal; it is hard to imagine that it could be seen in any other way. It allows, at a cultural level, for Augustine's conviction that the surest path to God leads within, urging the believer to find God in the intimacy of self-presence.

In part 1 of *Sources of the Self*, while reflecting on the broad sweep of modern moral theory, Taylor argues that we come to understand ourselves only against a background of things that have value (what he terms "horizons of significance") and through significant relationships within a defining community. Our sense of identity is, therefore, neither free-floating nor simply an instinctive response to realities we find attractive. Detached from horizons of significance and identity-defining relationships, human identity would be meaningless. Of course, this understanding does not mean that a person's sense of self is imposed from outside: it is necessarily personally chosen and realized against a background of meaning and

[50] See particularly Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1991), chap. 6; and Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, passim but particularly chaps. 1–4 and 25.

[51] Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity* 28–29, emphasis original.

relationship. However, he continues, at the level of popular culture the ideal of authenticity can become detached from both horizons of significance and identity-defining relationships. In this way, the ethic of authenticity slides into subjectivism, becoming pure self-creation—entirely an act of self-determining freedom. But this slide is self-defeating: it detaches us from the very connections that we require for our lives to have meaning.

Second, Taylor believes that the slide taking place in popular culture is intensified by a movement in the academy for which Nietzsche is the major figure, and he in turn has inspired postmodern writers of our time.[52] At the heart of these thinkers' understandings of human identity is an ethic of radical self-creation, which negates all horizons of significance. In Foucault's view, for example, the subject does not grow in identity; rather, subjects remake their existence. In one of Foucault's last works we read: "Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be."[53] Foucault sees the self as an esthetic construction, a work of art. It is Taylor's argument, then, that the work of writers such as Foucault articulates and gives a sense of credibility to the subjectivist slide in popular culture. But there is something deeply self-contradictory about Foucault's stance. As Taylor says, it is incoherent because "these thinkers buy into the background outlook of authenticity, for instance in their understanding of the creative, self-constitutive powers of language. . . . But they want to buy into it while ignoring some of its essential constituents."[54]

Dulles identifies a further aspect of the subjectivist temper of liberal culture. He points out that political discourse in the United States has been strongly shaped by one strand of liberal political theory, which holds that governments should be neutral on moral and religious questions. He draws attention to this strand of liberalism because he believes that it has effects beyond the sphere of politics, on society as a whole and on specific issues such as interreligious dialogue. This strand of liberal theory is certainly influential in the West today. One of its most articulate exponents, Ronald Dworkin, writes that the first principle of liberal government is to treat citizens as equals. He reasons from this principle that, because individuals have differing views of what human life entails, governments must be "independent of any particular conception of the good life."[55] But the fact

[52] See ibid. 60, 66; Taylor, "Immanent Counter-Enlightenment"; and most recently Taylor, *A Secular Age*, chaps. 17 and 18.

[53] Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982) 216.

[54] Taylor, *Ethics of Authenticity* 67.

[55] Ronald Dworkin, "Liberalism," in *A Matter of Principle* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1985) 181–204, at 191.

that this view is influential and often simply assumed does not mean that it gives a coherent account of the human person in society; nor does it mean that it gives the best account of the way in which liberal societies actually function.

Taylor engages at length with this reading of liberalism, offering responses at both the philosophical and political levels. While he recognizes the equality of citizens in a liberal society, he argues that the liberal neutrality view is based on a deficient ontology, since it regards society as a collection of isolated individuals who are random, detached choosers.[56] In Taylor's words, this is an atomist ontology: "a vision of society as in some sense constituted by individuals for the fulfillment of ends which were primarily individual."[57] Yet, as already indicated above, humans are intrinsically communal: we come to a sense of self within horizons of significance and within a defining community. In brief, Taylor argues that at the philosophical level the theory of liberal neutrality gives an adequate account neither of the human person in society nor of the functioning of liberal politics. Modern liberal societies can function only because citizens have a strong sense of identification with the enterprise; that is, there must be a strong sense of common good. The stance of liberal neutrality does not acknowledge the dimension of our common life. In Taylor's view, only republican or communitarian understandings of liberalism give an adequate account of this dimension of social and political life.[58]

So, what of my question about the part played by subjectivist understandings in liberal culture? How deeply have they affected this age? At the level of popular culture, the ethic of authenticity can certainly descend into subjectivist forms. But in the light of Taylor's argument about the structure of the modern identity, these subjectivist forms must be seen as debased expressions of a moral ideal. To judge the ethic of authenticity as

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[56] See particularly Charles Taylor, "Cross-Purposes: The Liberal-Communitarian Debate," in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1995) 181–203; Taylor, "Atomism," in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences* 187–210.

[57] Taylor, "Atomism" 187. Dworkin's stance of "liberal neutrality" differs greatly from the trenchant atomism of Robert Nozick and other libertarians who regard the free market as ultimately just and argue against any state intervention in the market; see Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic, 1974). Nonetheless, Dworkin shares the atomist mode of thought of much contemporary liberalism, regarding institutional structures simply as in the nature of collective instruments. No strong sense of the common good is at work here; see Taylor, "Cross-Purposes" 186–89.

[58] For a survey of the liberal-communitarian debate, see Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University, 2002), chaps. 3 and 6. See also Michael J. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: American in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1996).

inherently subjectivist would be to disregard the horizons of significance and identity-defining relationships through which we discover our identity. And while the liberal equality view of politics may separate government from conceptions of the good and so be open to the charge of subjectivism, there are better explanations of contemporary liberal politics. Again, although the liberal equality view may lead some citizens to conceive of our common life in an atomistic fashion, it does not give an adequate account either of their own lives or of how society functions.

What, then, are the implications of Taylor's analysis for the Church's dialogue with the world? At the outset, the relationship he brings to light between subjectivism and the moral ideal of authenticity means that subjectivism will always be a temptation in this culture and therefore a reality with which the Church will have to deal. Perhaps this connection between authenticity and subjectivism explains why Dulles and Schindler see subjectivism as pervasive and determining of liberal culture. The temptation to see authenticity predominantly in terms of self-creation makes it difficult to engage the broader and deeper questions of meaning in which our moral and religious lives are situated. Those engaged in dialogue, therefore, will often have to face the challenge of leading interlocutors beyond the stance of self-creation toward the horizons of significance on which their stance depends.

Yet liberal culture is not intrinsically subjectivist. Taylor's account of the modern identity reveals a vision of the good at its heart: the call to live one's life authentically and to the full. Subjectivism is a debased form of this moral ideal. To characterize our culture as intrinsically subjectivist is to mistake an aberration for the reality on which it depends. Amid the difficulties in dealing with the subjectivist influence, the gospel will be proclaimed in a culture in which people are searching to make sense of their lives against a framework of meaning. It will be important that those entrusted with the task of proclamation engage intelligently with their interlocutors' frameworks of meaning. Failing to engage with these would mean a failure in the task of proclamation; condemning the culture as intrinsically subjectivist would deny interlocutors the opportunity to hear the gospel in words that make sense to them.

If proclamation is conceived in dialogical terms, truth retains an important place. When a believer engages in conversation with another, seeking to understand the other on the other's own terms, if the believer chooses to speak of God, he or she will be saying in effect: "Does this make sense of what is happening? Is not God at work here?" And the ensuing conversation will revolve around whether the gospel can give a better account of their shared experience. As in Plato's understanding of dialogue, therefore, interlocutors will work toward a better account of the reality that is beyond them. Taylor sums up this aspect of Plato's view: "our becoming rational

ought not most perspicuously to be described as something that takes place in us, but rather better as our connecting up to the larger order in which we are placed."[59] Yet unlike in Plato's time, it will make very little sense to engage in dialogue in order to reveal his theory of Forms as the best account of reality. Neither will appealing to the worldview of Christendom make much sense: several centuries have elapsed since this has been the commonly accepted background understanding of reality. There is now no commonly accepted horizon of significance in which all concur: we live in a pluralist age. So, coming to the truth of the gospel will be the result of a personal quest. In each instance the journey of faith will lead individuals through an examination of their own frameworks of meaning to discover the Word who dwells among us. Schindler frequently reminds his readers that the path to finding the meaning of one's life in Jesus Christ and his living memory in the Church is a very particular path for which Jesus' life provides the horizon of significance and defining relationship.

PROCLAMATION AS DIALOGUE

Thus far I have argued that the promulgation of *Gaudium et spes* marked a major transition in the Roman Catholic Church's understanding of its relationship with the world. When the bishops recognized the social forms that characterize modernity, they set aside the worldview of Christendom which had shaped the Church for almost a millennium. In the process of coming to terms with the new social imaginary, they sketched the broad lines of a new view of the church-world relationship using dialogue as their primary metaphor. The bishops imagined the Church in conversation both with individuals and cultures, leading them to discover the fundamental truth of their existence in the gospel. Yet understanding the Church's task in dialogical terms does not commit it to the relativism influencing Western culture: that is my argument in the second section of this article. In fact, it is only through dialogue that believers can lead interlocutors to reflect on the frameworks of meaning that shape their lives and consider Jesus' way of self-giving love as that which is ultimately valuable.

Yet perhaps I am getting ahead of myself. I have yet to examine the concept of dialogue more fully in order to explore what it means to understand proclamation in dialogical terms. To address these two issues, I turn first to Hans-Georg Gadamer's work on the concept of dialogue, *Truth and Method*.[60]

Gadamer's magnum opus is a study of the nature of understanding in the human sciences. He argues that the method of the natural sciences, which aims toward a detached, scientific grasp of an object, cannot do justice to the type of understanding involved in the human sciences. Gadamer examines

[59] Taylor, *Sources of the Self* 123.   [60] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.

the kind of understanding involved in experiencing works of art, interpreting literary texts, and studying history. Although he is also concerned with understanding in the spheres of politics and public ethics, those topics are not prominent in *Truth and Method*. For Gadamer, the task of understanding a text, a work of art, or an event in history is best thought of in terms of speech partners who come to a common understanding—that is, as a dialogue, richly considered.

In Gadamer's rich sense, conversation or dialogue far exceeds the experience of individuals trading opinions. Rather, speech partners, engaged by a particular subject matter, ruminate back and forth and come to a new understanding of it. His idea that dialogue is led by the subject matter, rather than individual wills, is conveyed in his assertion that in its deepest sense, conversation is something that we "fall into" rather than something we conduct.[61] Gadamer summarizes his understanding of dialogue:

Conversation is a process of coming to an understanding. Thus it belongs to every true conversation that each person opens himself to the other, truly accepts his point of view as valid and transposes himself into the other to such an extent that he understands not the particular individual but what he says. What is to be grasped is the substantive rightness of his opinion, so that we can be at one with each other on the subject. Thus we do not relate the other's opinion to him but to our own opinions and views.[62]

Prior to his discussion of the nature of dialogue, Gadamer examines the role that prejudgments or prejudices play in understanding.[63] He argues that in approaching a text, for example, the student begins with a particular view of it (a prejudgment or prejudice), which engagement with the text will refute, confirm, or clarify. So, too, in a true conversation, interlocutors come under the truth of the subject matter, testing and clarifying their prejudgments in the back-and-forth of dialogue and in that way come into a new relationship. Gadamer reasons that, "to reach an understanding in a dialogue is . . . being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were."[64]

Gadamer's primary aim in *Truth and Method* is to give an account of the dialogical nature of understanding in the human sciences. I suggest that his concept of dialogue can help elucidate the Church's relationship with the world since Vatican II; it can clarify the dimensions of the Church's task of proclaiming the gospel. I will shortly offer an extended examination of Gadamer's understanding of dialogue, but even from the foregoing, three key aspects of a dialogical view of proclamation emerge: a deep openness to the other, allowing oneself to be conducted by the subject matter, and the discovery of an emerging truth.

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[61] Ibid. 383.
[62] Ibid. 385.
[63] See particularly ibid. 265–307.
[64] Ibid. 379.

However, Gadamer's perspective on dialogue is not without its critics. I pointed out above that in *Truth and Method* he focuses on the kind of understanding involved in interpreting works of art, texts, and history. In an important study, Richard Bernstein, although deeply appreciative of Gadamer's contribution to hermeneutics, has argued that Gadamer's focus has meant that he has not done justice to the kind of dialogue required in social and political settings.[65] "Gadamer's philosophic hermeneutics," observes Bernstein, "is virtually silent on the complex issues concerning domination and power."[66] Bernstein turns to the work of Jürgen Habermas for a view of dialogue that he believes is capable of overcoming inequalities of power and other ruptures in the social space.[67]

Habermas's major work, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, weaves together three fundamental strands of argument: the nature of reason as communicative action, a theory of society as lifeworld and system, and a theory of modernity.[68] Within the constraints of this essay I cannot give an account of the breadth and richness of that work and cannot even discuss the full dimensions of Habermas's discourse ethics.[69] But following Taylor, I want to point out that Habermas's discourse ethics contains a significant flaw that seriously compromises the type of dialogue required in social and political settings. In addition, I will argue that Gadamer's notion of dialogue has a greater ability to deal with the reality of social and political life than Bernstein allows. I will then turn to an essay in which Taylor explores the implications of Gadamer's view of dialogue for social life.

A pivotal argument in Habermas's theory of communicative action is that only questions of what it is right to do, not questions of what it is good to be, can be determined by discourse ethics.[70] And in settling questions of

[65] Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1991) 156–59.

[66] Ibid. 156.

[67] Ibid. 182–97. For an introduction to Habermas's thought, see Thomas McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge: Polity, 1984); and Richard J. Bernstein, "Introduction," in *Habermas and Modernity*, ed. Richard J. Bernstein (Cambridge: Polity, 1985) 1–32.

[68] Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1984); *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, *Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1987).

[69] For a fuller discussion of Habermas's discourse ethics, see James Gerard McEvoy, "Freedom in the World: The Significance of Karl Rahner's Theology of Freedom in the Light of Charles Taylor's View of the Modern Identity" (Ph.D. dissertation, Flinders University, 1994) 66–74.

[70] Habermas offers a brief, seven-point summary of what he considers the most important aspects of his discourse ethics in his "Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action," in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1990) 116–94, at

what it is right to do, he argues, interlocutors must distance themselves from understandings of their own identity and background.[71] So for Habermas, both personal and social understandings of value or of the good life, which by their nature belong to the identity of a subject or a group, cannot be open to dialogue in discourse ethics. Habermas insists that in dialogue interlocutors need "a knife that makes razor-sharp cuts between evaluative statements and strictly normative ones, between the good and the just."[72] Yet I have shown above that in Gadamer's understanding, true dialogue requires the back and forth movement by which interlocutors explore and refine the prejudices that they bring to a conversation.[73] Developing Gadamer's line of thought, Taylor examines this aspect of Habermas's discourse ethics and argues that once the common space of dialogue has been ruptured, the only way in which consensus can be repaired is through articulating "what in our form of life is both good and has proved itself in intersubjective terms."[74] Taylor argues that the common ground cannot be recovered by a procedural ethic, as advocated by Habermas, because it eschews the shared background understandings of the interlocutors.[75]

Therefore, while, like Bernstein, I recognize that true dialogue must deal with the complex issues of domination and power, I believe that a procedural understanding of discourse will not bring about the consensus required. Rather, as Taylor argues, in the wake of a rupture in the common space, it can only be restored through exploration of the self-understandings and shared world of the interlocutors. Furthermore, a procedural understanding of dialogue will be of very little assistance in the task of proclaiming the gospel.

133–38. See also Jürgen Habermas, *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics*, trans. Ciaran P. Cronin (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1993).

[71] Habermas, in "Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action" 119–22, articulates the principles of universality and discourse ethics by which this distancing is achieved.

[72] Habermas, "Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification," *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* 104.

[73] Gadamer makes a related point in a personal response to Bernstein, published as an appendix to *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* 262–64.

[74] Charles Taylor, "Language and Society," in *Communicative Action: Essays on Jürgen Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action,* ed. Axel Honneth and Hans Joas, trans. Jeremy Gaines and Doris L. Jones (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1991) 23–35, at 34. Habermas responds to Taylor's critique in "A Reply," in *Communicative Action* 215–22.

[75] For a similar critique of Habermas's view of moral experience, see Seyla Benhabib, "Autonomy, Modernity, and Community: Communitarianism and Social Theory in Dialogue," in *Situating the Self: Gender, Community, and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 68–88, at 71, 75.

In an essay marking Gadamer's 100th birthday, Taylor shows that Gadamer's notion of dialogue not only applies to the understanding of texts, works of art, and history, but also informs dialogue in social and political life.[76] He identifies three basic, interrelated features of Gadamer's concept of dialogue, which I will sketch so as to reflect on their relevance for a dialogical understanding of proclamation. The three features of Gadamer's concept of dialogue identified by Taylor are dialogue as bilateral, party-dependent, and involving the conversation partners in revising goals.

The first feature that Taylor identifies in Gadamer's dialogical view—understanding as bilateral—distinguishes it from the unilateral methods of the natural sciences that strive for an explanation of the object under investigation, an explanation that will not require further revision. In the human sciences, this kind of knowledge is neither possible nor desirable, as Taylor points out: "Gadamer does not believe that the kind of knowledge that yields complete intellectual control over the object is attainable, even in principle, in human affairs."[77] In the human sciences, including the study of other societies and cultures, the student necessarily responds to the perspective and self-understanding of those being studied, and the goal of the study is a kind of transformation in mutual understanding rather than detached, objective description. From the point of view of this first feature, then, dialogue requires engagement with the self-understanding of the other, whether an individual, a group, or a culture. Here, the power of Gadamer's image of the back and forth of conversation is clear: without the perspective of the other, there is no dialogue. In some cases, such as the study of ancient cultures, those studied will not be able to answer for themselves, the student will have to work toward her best account. However, the goal remains: to understand others on their own terms.

Regarding the second feature of Gadamer's dialogical view—understanding as party-dependent—Taylor points out that understanding in the human sciences will vary with different interlocutors and certainly with different cultures. He offers as an example: the language we arrive at to express our understanding of one culture may be entirely inappropriate for another culture. And further, the account will vary not only with the culture studied, but also with the inquirer: a student with a different background or from a later era may be able to offer a better, richer account of a particular reality than a student from this culture at this time. This party-dependent feature means that in every dialogue the inquirer will have to attend not only to the self-understanding of the other but also to his own path toward the other. Understanding the other will engage the student in a process of clarifying his assumptions or prejudices and finding the most suitable language for giving the best account of the other.

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[76] Taylor, "Understanding the Other."   [77] Ibid. 281.

Taylor's third feature of Gadamer's dialogical view—revising goals—is closely related to the second. Coming to an understanding of the other will require considerable change in the student's outlook; understanding the other necessarily means understanding ourselves anew:

In a successful conversation they both [the dialogue partners] come under the influence of the truth of the object and are thus bound to one another in a new community. To reach an understanding in dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were.[78]

This process of mutual understanding is what Gadamer means by "fusion of horizons."[79] Taylor conveys the same idea with the slogan, "no understanding the other without a changed understanding of self."[80]

We can now examine what proclamation as dialogue might mean. The three features of Gadamer's notion of dialogue identified by Taylor will assist our reflection. If the task of proclaiming the gospel is understood as dialogical, the first feature of Gadamer's view—dialogue as bilateral—implies that the gospel cannot be regarded as a set of appropriately identified and clearly delineated formulae awaiting imposition on the other. Those entrusted with the task of proclamation could not approach their addressees having already figured out what the gospel requires of them. Rather, through the patient back and forth of dialogue, addressees would have to be invited into an encounter with the gospel and asked in effect, Does this make sense of your world? Is not God at work here? What is taking place here is the "openness" in dialogue of which Gadamer writes.[81] Instead of seeing proclamation as an attempt to convince or alter the other, it is better understood as an offer to another to consider whether the language of faith makes sense of her existence. Of course, when an addressee takes faith seriously, the practice of faith will transform her self-understanding and life; yet this transformation will come about through her appropriation of the gospel rather than through extrinsic imposition. This stance is radically different from that adopted by the Church during the period of Christendom, through which it attempted to make over the social and political reality in the image of the gospel and canon law. In light of Gadamer's major line of thought in *Truth and Method*, perhaps the dominance of the natural sciences in our time has also influenced theological reflection and led believers to regard doctrines as definitive statements simply awaiting application if only the other could grasp reality, rather than expressions of faith into which the other is invited.

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[78] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 379.   [79] Ibid. 306–7, 374–75.
[80] Taylor, "Understanding the Other" 295.
[81] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* 361–62.

The second feature of Gadamer's dialogical view—dialogue as party-dependent—also has important implications for the proclamation of the gospel. Proclaiming the gospel will not only involve the believer in presenting the gospel message to his interlocutor in the language most suitable for the hearer; it will also involve the believer in a process of self-questioning, in order to come to a deeper, clearer understanding of the significance of the gospel in this new context. The believer's task of constantly clarifying his understanding of the other will be an essential aspect of proclamation. Without entering into the self-understanding of the other, the believer would have little idea about the significance of the gospel for the other's life. In the case of proclamation to an individual, entering his perspective will obviously be a personal matter, accomplished in conversation. In the more general case, when addressing an audience, congregation, or society, for example, proclamation will involve the believer in exploring what Taylor terms the social imaginary of the addressees—that is, the background understanding of social surroundings that makes their common life possible. Here the conversation will take a range of forms, including individual and group interaction along with a study of the history, culture and society of the addressees. In both the individual and general cases the journey will be one of increasing clarity for the believer, allowing him to grow in understanding of the other on the other's terms.

The third feature of Gadamer's view of dialogue—revising goals—challenges those who proclaim the gospel. From a dialogical perspective, proclaimers must deeply value both what they bear and whom they address. To preach the gospel is to make a discovery. It means, as we have already seen, that the believer will come to a clearer understanding of the other's difference and will in turn understand herself anew. But it also means that in that process the believer will discover that God is at work in the other in ways that she had not previously known. When understood as dialogue, the task of proclamation will necessarily lead the proclaimer into a deeper knowledge of God through encounter with the other. The dialogical perspective again contrasts with that of Christendom: proclamation no longer means making over the other in the image of the gospel and canon law; it means coming to a fuller knowledge of God through encounter with the other.

When understood in this rich sense, a dialogical view of proclamation has much to commend it. First, God is recognized as the ultimate truth of human life; thus proclamation does not fall victim to contemporary subjectivism and relativism. Indeed, this conception accounts well for the incomprehensible truth of God's existence since it articulates the way in which both the addressee and the proclaimer are led more fully into the truth of God's presence through the proclamation event. Second, a dialogical view of proclamation better explains the act of proclamation in a culture in which the Church no longer has a directive role and in which the dignity

of every individual is strongly valued. It articulates the dynamics by which the addressees come to recognize the gospel as God's word to them.

This dialogical understanding of proclamation has much in common with another strand of Christian theology: the renewal of the theology of the Trinity in the second half of the 20th century. Contemporary trinitarian theology has reemphasized that God is revealed as both Word and Spirit. Walter Kasper, an important contributor to the renewal, regards the theology of the Holy Spirit as the "ultimate ground" of the reality and understanding of the salvation Christ offers.[82] He sees the Spirit as the "source of movement and life in the created world" and also as active in world religions and human culture.[83] He also argues that attention to the Spirit's presence leads believers deeper into the realm of Christian faith.

Such an understanding of the Spirit's role can also be found in the teaching of Vatican II and of John Paul II. As I noted earlier, *Gaudium et spes* teaches that, since humanity is "continually stirred by the Spirit of God" (*GS* no. 41), believers must engage in the task of discernment. From the council's perspective, then, the task of discernment demands that pastors, theologians, and the whole community, themselves moved by the Spirit, listen to "the various voices of our day" (*GS* no. 44) so as to understand the revealed truth more fully and express it more clearly. Here, the lives of others are not seen as neutral territory to be made over with the language of the gospel; rather, the lives of others have the capacity to reveal the Spirit of God to the believer. And further, only through attending to the other can the believer better understand the presence and action of God in today's world. Gavin D'Costa writes that understanding the council's point here is crucial for the Church's dialogue with other religions: "If the church is not attentive to the possibility of the Spirit within other religions, it will fail to be attentive to the Word of God that has been entrusted to it. . . . Christianity itself is fulfilled in receiving the gift of God that the Other might bear."[84]

John Paul II developed this theme of the Church's dialogue with the world. In *Redemptoris missio* (hereafter *RM*) he first says that the Spirit is offered to all—"not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions" (*RM* no. 28), and this requires believers to ponder the activity of the Spirit in all times and places. He then points out that the presence and action of the Spirit are integrally related to the Word of God:

This is the same Spirit who was at work in the incarnation and in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and who is at work in the Church. He is therefore not an

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[82] Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (London: SCM, 1983) 227. See particularly section 3 of part 2, 198–229.

[83] Kasper, *God of Jesus Christ* 227.

[84] Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000) 114.

alternative to Christ, nor does he fill a sort of void which is sometimes suggested as existing between Christ and the Logos. Whatever the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions serves as a preparation for the Gospel and can only be understood in reference to Christ, the Word who took flesh by the power of the Spirit "so that as perfectly human he would save all human beings and sum up all things." (*RM* no. 29)

The relationship identified here between Word and Spirit has implications for proclamation.

A believer dedicated to proclaiming the word of God cannot ignore the presence of the Spirit in the other. Attentiveness to the action of the Spirit must be an integral aspect of proclamation. Such attentiveness will not only provide insight into the terms in which the gospel might make sense to the other, just as importantly it will be a revelatory event for the believer. In D'Costa's words, it will "bring the church more truthfully into the presence of the triune God."[85]

For the believer, then, the task of proclamation is truly a dialogue: he gives voice to the gospel of Jesus Christ yet in that very act, and prior to it, is addressed by the Spirit. In this context, Taylor's slogan, "no understanding the other without a changed understanding of self," takes on a theological hue. Proclamation means being open to encounter God's Spirit at work in the other. Although it is true that the believer can discern the action of the Spirit only in the light of God's word, it is also true that the Spirit will surprise.

Such an understanding of proclamation is a world away from the structural understanding that dominated the period of Christendom. From the perspective of dialogue, the other is not seen as there to be extrinsically shaped by the gospel; rather the gospel is offered to the other so that the other might find that it makes best sense of life, even enabling her to recognize the Spirit at work. This is the force of my argument in the first section of this article that the move from Christendom to dialogue should be understood in the context of a shift in the social imaginary. In this new context, dialogue is not one activity among others in the Church's missionary task (the listening that precedes talking/telling/proclaiming).[86] Through attention to the Spirit of God at work in the other, the dialogical mode of proclamation will help the Church to grow in love of both God and neighbor.

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[85] Ibid. 115.

[86] D'Costa makes the related point that after Vatican II, understanding dialogue as one element of the task of proclamation is confused: "I would like to suggest that the often cited distinctions between mission, dialogue, and inculturation are fluid and unhelpful. This is because if the church must learn another language as its first language, if it is to engage in dialogue and mission, then both activities are intrinsically related. In any engagement, even the act of understanding, questions and criticism as well as affirmation will surface. In this sense, mission is impossible without dialogue, and vice versa" (ibid. 131).