

Return of the Golden Calf: Economy, Idolatry, and Secularization since *Gaudium et spes*

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Abstract

Pope Francis consistently addresses economic issues with the concept of idolatry, but *Gaudium et spes* treats the economy as an autonomous, secular realm amenable to technocratic solutions guided by principles of right reason. Cavanaugh accounts for this difference by examining changes in theories about secularization from the 1960s to the present. He argues that today we are less likely to see the secular realm as neutral and devoid of belief, and more likely to see it as enchanted and idolatrous.

Keywords

Disenchantment, economy, *Evangelii gaudium*, *Gaudium et spes*, idolatry, Marxism and religion, Pope Francis, Edward Schillebeeckx, secularization, Vatican II

Pope Francis has been widely credited with reviving the spirit of Vatican II after some resistance to its initiatives under the previous two pontificates. In an article published in the *National Catholic Reporter* a year ago, for example, Eugene Cullen Kennedy wrote, “Perhaps a fitting standalone description for Pope Francis is ‘I am Vatican II.’”¹ According to Kennedy, “the world had, in the Vatican I

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1. Eugene Cullen Kennedy, “Pope Francis to Us: ‘I Am Vatican II,’” *National Catholic Reporter*, January 16, 2014, <http://ncronline.org/blogs/bulletins-human-side/pope-francis-us-i-am-vatican-ii>. (All URLs cited herein were accessed July 24, 2015.)
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church, always been regarded as part of a sinister triumvirate with the flesh and the devil.²² Vatican II took a much more positive view of the world, and Pope Francis has likewise been intent on “serving its needs more than condemning its faults.”²³ Francis has signaled his continuity with Vatican II in myriad gestures and words, including the echo of the “joy” of *Gaudium et spes* (*GS*) in the title of his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (*EG*).

I find the broad outlines of this story correct: Vatican II consciously and rightly adopted a more positive orientation toward the world outside the Church, and Pope Francis embodies that spirit. When it comes to his statements on economic matters, however, Francis appears to depart from this script rather dramatically. One of the most frequently recurring images used for the contemporary world economy in his writings, speeches, and interviews is that of idolatry. Derivations of the term “idol” appear more times in *EG* than in all the documents of the Second Vatican Council combined, and all but one of the appearances of the term in *EG* appear in the section on economics.⁴ Indeed, Francis virtually never talks about the contemporary economy without leveling the charge of idolatry, a charge absent from the discussion of economics in *GS* and almost entirely absent from Vatican II as a whole.

What accounts for the difference between the treatment of economic matters in *GS* and that of Pope Francis? My thesis is that Francis represents an opportunity to shift Catholic discourse about secularization, an opportunity with implications for the way we look not only at economics but at other secular phenomena as well. Progressive Catholic thought in the period of the Second Vatican Council tended to view the secular world as disenchanting. Francis has suggested, on the contrary, that we are faced not so much with a loss of faith as with a new religion, an idolatrous faith. Such an approach could open up new possibilities for a theological response to secularization. My intention in this article is to contribute to the history of Catholic approaches to secularization and to suggest that the theological lens of idolatry can be a productive way to approach secularization generally and economy more particularly.

I begin by examining the text of *GS* and the writings and speeches of Pope Francis on economic matters. I then examine the background of the 1960s treatments of secularization among progressive Catholic writers, showing how they tended to view secular fields like the economy as neutral, autonomous, and disenchanting. I then discuss how scholarship on the secular has changed since the 1960s, and how enchanted and religious elements are often identified in a capitalist economy. Finally, I argue that Francis’s attacks on the idolatry of money can be understood in the spirit of Vatican II, not as a negative judgment on the world, but as an identification of and with the world’s deepest longings.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Derivations of “idol” appear four times in *EG*, and three times in all the documents of Vatican II, as detailed below in section II.

I. *Gaudium et spes* on Economics

Although I concentrate my remarks on chapter 3 of part II of *GS* (nos. 63–72), which directly addresses economic and social life, I cannot ignore the overall context of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. As Norman Tanner has commented, *GS* “was more than the sum of its parts. Its perceived importance lay even more in its overall tone and approach than in the details of what it said.”⁵ The majority of the Council Fathers wanted to turn toward the world and away from a defensive posture that had marked the Church in Europe—with significant exceptions—since the French Revolution. The document has been accused of—in Giuseppe Alberigo’s words—a “facile historical optimism of a ‘Western’ kind,”⁶ but the charge is not entirely fair. Though there is plenty of language of the growth, evolution, progress, and maturity of “man” in the text (e.g., nos. 4, 6, 25, 26, 33–35), such language is tempered in the final version by a recognition of various social problems and of sin, the “basic imbalance which is rooted in the heart of man” (no. 10; see also nos. 13, 25, 37), as the foundation of those problems.⁷

Nevertheless, there is little sense in *GS* that the opponents of the gospel in the world are in the grip of something larger than themselves. The treatment of atheism—which the council regards as “among the most serious problems of this age” (no. 9)—is instructive in this regard. Atheism is treated as a lack, a subtraction of a sense of God from the world. People interpret scientific progress and humanism as a call to reject religion as magical and superstitious (no. 7). Atheists are treated as sincere and rational people; atheism is not a form of belief but of unbelief, often motivated by protest against evil or against the hypocrisy of religious believers. Believers must therefore share some of the blame for the spread of atheism (no. 19). Moved by the power that humanity has gained through technological progress, atheists seek freedom for humankind and an ability to control our destiny. Some forms of atheism pursue the “liberation of man especially through his economic and social emancipation,” which requires turning from otherworldly to this-worldly concerns (no. 20). Though atheists are grievously misguided, the council seeks to engage them in “prudent and sincere dialogue” so that they might “examine the Gospel of Christ with an open mind” (no. 21).

In the tradition of Schleiermacher’s address to the “cultured despisers” of Christianity, *GS* often seems directed toward an educated, middle-class, rapidly secularizing, European audience. The Church’s competitors for this audience were Marxists and existentialists, clearly referenced in no. 10:

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5. Norman Tanner, *The Church and the World: Gaudium et Spes*, Inter Mirifica (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2005) 63.
 6. Giuseppe Alberigo, “Transition to a New Age,” *History of Vatican II*, vol. 5, *The Council and the Transition, the Fourth Period and the End of the Council, September 1965–December 1965*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell, ed. Joseph Komonchak (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006) 573–603, at 611.
 7. All translations of Vatican II documents are taken from the Vatican website, www.vatican.va.

Thinking they have found serenity in an interpretation of reality everywhere proposed these days, many look forward to a genuine and total emancipation of humanity wrought solely by human effort; they are convinced that the future rule of man over the earth will satisfy every desire of his heart. Nor are there lacking men who despair of any meaning to life and praise the boldness of those who think that human existence is devoid of any inherent significance and strive to confer a total meaning on it by their own ingenuity alone.

In the debate over Schema XIII (eventually *GS*) in the third session of the council, bishops from the Third World complained that the document was too First World in its approach,⁸ too focused on secularization and Communism; the complaint was likewise directed at the final version.⁹ Sections like that in no. 61 of the final document, which recommends using one's leisure time for tourism and sports activities, only reinforce the impression that bourgeois Europeans were both the primary authors and the primary intended audience.

The chapter of *GS* that deals specifically with economic matters is also marked not by a simple optimism—the document recognizes “reasons for anxiety” (no. 67) such as materialism and inequality—but by the conviction that the problems can and should be addressed by sincere and rational persons:

Our contemporaries are coming to feel these inequalities with an ever sharper awareness, since they are thoroughly convinced that the ampler technical and economic possibilities which the world of today enjoys can and should correct this unhappy state of affairs. Hence, many reforms in the socioeconomic realm and a change of mentality and attitude are required of all. For this reason the Church down through the centuries and in the light of the Gospel has worked out the principles of justice and equity demanded by right reason both for individual and social life and for international life, and she has proclaimed them especially in recent times. (No. 63)

The list of such required reforms and changes of mentality is long and includes examples such as: inequalities should be removed; there should be an increase in access to markets and fair income; there should be no discrimination against migrants (no. 66); the dignity of labor should be recognized, and work should be adapted to the needs of the person (no. 67); workers should share in profits and decision making (no. 68); the poor should be cared for, and goods regarded not simply as private property but as meant for serving the common good (no. 69); and underused land should be distributed to those who can use it fruitfully (no. 71).

All these recommendations are good, and together they add up to a picture of what a sound economy would look like. Though the recommendations are mostly of a very general nature, the Council Fathers did take several bold positions. Their support for land reform, for example, had direct import in Latin American countries where expropriation was a hot topic in the 1960s and beyond. This section of *GS* has

8. Tanner, *The Church and the World* 16–17.

9. For example, Robert J. Schreiter, C.P.P.S., “*Gaudium et Spes*: The Church in the World,” *New Theology Review* 25.2 (2012) 39–44, at 43.

been faulted for being already dated upon its appearance, for not addressing contemporary changes in the economy such as the flexible postwar monetary system. The section on economics has also been criticized for its general moralizing and its failure to get advice from professionals in the field of economics.¹⁰ But the Council Fathers did not intend to do more than provide “principles of justice and equity demanded by right reason” (no. 63), the details of which were to be worked out by professional economists. According to *GS*, “economic activity is to be carried on according to its own methods and laws within the limits of the moral order” (no. 64). The autonomy and rationality of the economic sphere is implied by the document’s earlier insistence on the “autonomy of earthly affairs” and the “rightful independence of the sciences” (no. 36), which presumably includes the science of economics. This autonomy is not to the exclusion of God, of course; the autonomy of earthly affairs “is not merely required by modern man, but harmonizes also with the will of the Creator. For by the very circumstance of their having been created, all things are endowed with their own stability, truth, goodness, proper laws and order” (no. 36). What the gospel adds to the laws of economics are guiding principles that stake out the limits of the moral order.

Seen 50 years after the promulgation of *GS*, the section on economics is remarkable for what it is missing. There is no mention at all of the monetary system. Consumption and consumerism are likewise almost entirely absent, save perhaps for the brief contrast in no. 63 between those who lack the necessities of life and those who live in luxury. According to the Council Fathers, “the number constantly swells of the people who raise the most basic questions or recognize them with a new sharpness: what is man?” (no. 10). They see no constantly swelling number of people who just want a new television set. The realm of economics remains the realm of sober and rational men attempting to properly arrange the material world of goods. The section of *GS* on economic activity does not mention sin, and while one finds a “lack of economic and social balance” (no. 63), the document never attributes the cause of those imbalances to sin. Needless to say, there is no mention of idolatry. Both the Marxists and the capitalists that the document seems to have in view are the Western European sort: the Marxists sincere and scientific, the capitalists hardworking and responsible for a general postwar prosperity. The Eastern European voices at the council that clamored for a condemnation of totalitarian Marxism¹¹ and the Third World voices that decried the terrible suffering of millions excluded from capitalist prosperity¹² were reflected only in muted ways in the final version of *GS*.

10. See Gilles Routhier, “Finishing the Work Begun: The Trying Experience of the Fourth Period,” *History of Vatican II* 5:49–184, at 168 n. 477; and Peter Hünermann, “The Final Weeks of the Council,” *History of Vatican II*, 5:363–483, at 387–88 n. 38

11. Routhier, “Finishing the Work Begun” 148–53.

12. See *ibid.* 168; and Tanner, *The Church and the World* 16.

II. Pope Francis on Economics

Despite the centrality of the concept of idolatry to the biblical witness—it is, after all, the subject of the first of the Ten Commandments—and despite the importance of Scripture to the Council Fathers, the concept of idolatry had very little impact in the proceedings of the Second Vatican Council. In the thousand or so pages of the council documents,¹³ derivations of the word “idol” appear just three times. In *Lumen gentium*, the Church is said to snatch people “from the slavery of error and of idols” (no. 17). In the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam actuositatem*, we are warned against “those who have trusted excessively in the progress of the natural sciences and the technical arts have fallen into an idolatry of temporal things and have become their slaves rather than their masters” (no. 7). Finally, in *GS* we are assured that, thanks to our belief in Christ’s incarnation, cross, and resurrection, “the Church can anchor the dignity of human nature against all tides of opinion, for example those which undervalue the human body or idolize it” (no. 41).

By contrast, idolatry is an important concept for Pope Francis. His first encyclical, *Lumen fidei*, uses the word “idol(s)” or “idolatry” 14 times. There the pope declares that the opposite of faith is not a simple lack of belief but idolatry. When one stops believing in God, one does not simply stop believing; rather one believes in all sorts of things, “an aimless passing from one lord to another. . . . Those who choose not to put their trust in God must hear the din of countless idols crying out: ‘Put your trust in me!’” (no. 13).

Francis has repeatedly made clear that the “lords” that people worship need not be explicitly named gods. For Francis, as for the biblical witness, idolatry is not merely a problem of the worship of celestial beings other than the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In the Bible, idolatry includes giving priority to created things like military might (Isa 31:1), bodily appetites (Phil 3:19), and wealth. The letter to the Colossians identifies greed with idolatry (Col 3:5). Jesus seems to personify Mammon not because people explicitly worshipped a god of that name, but because people have a tendency to put their trust in money rather than in the one true God (Mt 6:24).

In *EG* Pope Francis has most famously decried the idolatry of the contemporary global economy. His language is unsparing and personal. “Such an economy kills. How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points?” (no. 53). Francis critiques not only economic policy but also economic theory:

In this context, some people continue to defend trickle-down theories which assume that economic growth, encouraged by a free market, will inevitably succeed in bringing about greater justice and inclusiveness in the world. This opinion, which has never been confirmed by the facts, expresses a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power and in the sacralized workings of the prevailing economic system. (No. 54)

13. The 16 official documents of the council cover 1,001 pages in the Flannery edition; see Austin P. Flannery, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975).

The economy is not an autonomous, secular, material realm guided by well-meaning technocrats; it is sacralized. Gross inequality is “the result of ideologies which defend the absolute autonomy of the marketplace and financial speculation” (no. 56). The market, says Francis, has become absolutized, so that the true God can appear only as an “unmanageable” threat (no. 57), and the poor and the environment a nuisance, to the “interests of a deified market” (no. 56).

We have created new idols. The worship of the ancient golden calf (cf. *Ex* 32:1–35) has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose. The worldwide crisis affecting finance and the economy lays bare their imbalances and, above all, their lack of real concern for human beings; man is reduced to one of his needs alone: consumption. (No. 55)

EG caused consternation among defenders of free-market ideology when it appeared in November 2013, but its language on economics was not new; much of its diagnosis was taken almost verbatim from an address Pope Francis gave in May of the same year to a group of ambassadors.¹⁴ Indeed, Francis has repeated the theme of the idolatry of money and of the contemporary economy to audiences of all kinds. A week after his address to the ambassadors, Francis delivered a homily to the bishops of the Italian Episcopal Conference in which he prayed, “Save us from the idolatry of the present time,” idolatry that includes “the enticement of money.”¹⁵ In a general audience in June 2013, the pope decried the dynamics of an economy where it is no longer humans but money that commands. “Men and women are sacrificed to the idols of profit and consumption: it is the ‘culture of waste.’ . . . Consumerism has induced us to be accustomed to excess.”¹⁶ Later in 2013, during his meeting with workers in Cagliari, Francis reiterated the dangers of idolatry, denouncing “an economic system centered on an idol called ‘money’” and “this idolatrous economic system.” According to Francis, “God did not want an idol to be at the centre of the world but man, men and women who would keep the world going with their work. Yet now, in this system devoid of ethics, at the centre there is an idol and the world has become an idolater of this ‘god-money.’” Pope Francis counsels not resignation but resistance: “Let us be cunning, for the Lord tells us that idols are more clever than

14. “Address of Pope Francis to the New Non-Resident Ambassadors to the Holy See: Kyrgyzstan, Antigua and Barbuda, Luxembourg, and Botswana,” May 16, 2013, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/may/documents/papa-francesco_20130516_nuovi-ambasciatori.html.

15. Pope Francis, “Profession of Faith with the Bishops of the Italian Episcopal Conference,” May 23, 2013, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130523_omelia-professio-fidei-cei.html.

16. Pope Francis, “General Audience,” St. Peter’s Square, June 5, 2013, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130605_udienza-generale.html.

17. “Address of Holy Father Francis,” Pastoral Visit to Cagliari, Meeting with Workers, September 22, 2013, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130922_lavoratori-cagliari.html.

we are.”¹⁷ A month later, Francis again addressed the question of money, suggesting that it should not be demonized, since it contributes to many good works, but warning that, just as Jesus said that we cannot serve two masters, God and money, we must choose between two roads: “God’s road of humility, of bending down to serve” and “the road of covetousness, which ends in idolatry.” Covetousness, he added, was the ambition to attain to a kind of “idolatrous divinity.”¹⁸

Despite criticism of *EG* from inside and outside the Church since the document’s publication,¹⁹ Pope Francis has not backed away from his persistent denunciation of economic idolatry. In an interview with the Spanish newspaper *La Vanguardia* in June 2014, Francis continued to attack “the idolatry of money” and “idolatrous economies.”²⁰ In his interview excerpted from the forthcoming book *Papa Francesco: Questa economia uccide (Pope Francis: This Economy Kills)*, Francis reiterated his concern about the idolatry of money and again cited Jesus’ saying about God and wealth. Francis also elaborated the defining characteristics of idolatry: “Poverty leads one away from idolatry, from feeling self-sufficient.”²¹ Wealth is not itself the problem; it is this feeling of self-sufficiency, the refusal to recognize one’s dependence on God, that marks idolatry: “The Gospel does not condemn the rich but rather the idolatry of wealth, that idolatry that renders one insensitive to the cry of the poor.”²² Most recently in Paraguay Pope Francis condemned “an economic model which is idolatrous, which needs to sacrifice human lives on the altar of money and profit.”²³ He addressed these remarks not only

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18. Pope Francis, “Money Helps, Covetousness Kills,” Morning Meditation in the Chapel of the *Domus Sanctae Marthae*, October 21, 2013, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/cotidie/2013/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20131021_money-covetousness.html.
 19. For a representative Catholic critique, see Steve Moore, “Vatican’s Turn to the Left Will Make the Poor Poorer,” *Forbes*, January 5, 2015, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/steve-moore/2015/01/05/vaticans-turn-to-the-left-will-make-the-poor-poorer>. The opening line of the article is “Pope Francis – and I say this as a Catholic – is a complete disaster when it comes to his public policy pronouncements.”
 20. “Entrevista al Papa Francisco: ‘La secesion de una nación hay que tomarla con pinzas,’” *El Sismografo*, June 13, 2014, <http://ilsismografo.blogspot.com/2014/06/vaticano-entrevista-al-papa-francisco.html>.
 21. “La povertà allontana dall’idolatria, dal sentirci autosufficienti”; Pope Francis, quoted in Andrea Tornielli and Giacomo Galeazzi, “Intervista a Papa Francesco,” January 11, 2015, <http://www.lastampa.it/2015/01/11/italia/cronache/avere-cura-di-chi-povero-non-comunismo-vangelo-lasvmlIioCWdmI0mYz192J/pagina.html>.
 22. “Il Vangelo non condanna i ricchi ma l’idolatria della ricchezza, quell’idolatria che rende insensibili al grido del povero” (ibid.). In the interview, Francis also defends Pope Pius XI, who had warned in *Quadragesimo anno* (1931) of an “international imperialism of money.” Pius was not exaggerating, says Francis, but rather, like a good mountain climber, was farsighted.
 23. Pope Francis, “Meeting with Representatives of Civil Society,” Asunción, Paraguay, July 11, 2015, no. 3 (http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/july/documents/papa-francesco_20150711_paraguay-societa-civile.html).

to business leaders and politicians but also to economists,²⁴ showing again that it is not just policy but also economic theory that is at the heart of the problem.

Many more examples could be added,²⁵ but the point should be clear: the approaches of *GS* and Pope Francis to questions of economy are markedly different. Francis does not believe that the economy is an autonomous, secular realm amenable to technocratic solutions guided by principles of right reason. He believes that the global economy is dominated by a new, idolatrous religion.

III. Catholic Approaches to Secularization in the 1960s

What accounts for the difference between Francis and *GS*? We are accustomed to running differences within the post-Vatican II Church through dichotomies like progressive and conservative, optimistic and pessimistic, Thomist and Augustinian,²⁶

24. The sentence quoted above is followed by, "In economics, in business and in politics, what counts first and foremost, in every instance, is the human person and the environment in which he or she lives" (ibid.).
25. Pope Francis's closest collaborators have also taken up the theme of idolatry in reference to the economy. Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez, coordinator of Francis's Council of Cardinal Advisers, has stated, "A system has been built now as a new idolatry and it's only the true God that has to be served and not worshipping idols, even if that idol is called market economy" (quoted in Joshua J. McElwee, "Cardinal Staunchly Defends Pope's Critiques of Capitalism," *National Catholic Reporter*, June 3, 2014 [http://ncronline.org/news/peace-justice/cardinal-staunchly-defends-pope-s-critiques-capitalism]).
26. In an influential article, Joseph Komonchak has suggested accounting for tensions among the progressive majority in the redaction and reception of *GS* in terms of tensions between Augustinian and Thomist approaches to theological method. Marie-Dominique Chenu's defense of *GS* derived not from his congenital optimism but from his Thomist emphasis on the autonomy and intelligibility of creation. Joseph Ratzinger's postconciliar reservations about *GS* can be understood not in terms of a desired return to a preconciliar suspicion of the world and separation of nature and grace but in terms of an Augustinian concern that an emphasis on the created autonomy of the world would make revelation and faith an arbitrary imposition on top of a natural substrate. Komonchak's article is helpful, I think, for assessing some of the differences in approaches to *GS* during the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, but it does little to help assess the contributions of Pope Francis. The complete English version of Komonchak's essay, "The Redaction and Reception of *GS*: Tensions within the Majority at Vatican II," can be found at <https://jakomonchak.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/jak-views-of-gaudium-et-spes.pdf>. An abridged version was published as "Augustine, Aquinas or the Gospel *sine glossa*: Divisions over *GS*," in *Unfinished Journey: The Church 40 Years after Vatican II: Essays for John Wilkins*, ed. Austen Ivereigh (New York: Continuum, 2003) 102–18. Unfortunately, the nuances of Komonchak's article are sometimes lost. One recent book on *GS* (Michael Lawler, Todd Salzman, and Eileen Burke-Sullivan, *The Church in the Modern World: Gaudium et Spes Then and Now* [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2014]) uses Komonchak's article to divide the factions at the council into neo-Augustinians, who had a static, classicist perspective, and neo-Thomists, who were historically conscious and progressive. This schema fails on a number of fronts, the most obvious being that the dominant anti-Modernist and

world-affirming and world-denying, Vatican II supporters and Vatican II detractors, hermeneutic of rupture and hermeneutic of continuity, and so on. None of these dichotomies helps in this case. To say that Francis has turned his back on Vatican II would, of course, be ridiculous, and to say that he is world-denying or bears an Augustinian pessimism about the world would be equally unhelpful. In his homily for World Youth Day at the Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida, Francis warned of the attraction of “idols” such as money, success, power, and pleasure, and located the roots of such idolatry in a sense of loneliness and emptiness felt by many people. He then proclaimed, “Let us maintain a positive outlook on reality,” and encouraged the young people present to be hopeful, open to being surprised by God, and joyful. “Christians are joyful, they are never gloomy. God is at our side. . . . Sin and death have been defeated. Christians cannot be pessimists!”²⁷

I do not think that Francis’s approach to economics can be attributed to his temperament or his training in a particular theological school of thought. I do think his approach is in part traceable to his proximity to the poor in Latin America, where reformist promises of the well-being that the free market is always just about to bring sound increasingly hollow.²⁸ Rather than try to trace a genealogy of Pope Francis’s thinking, however, I am more interested in situating his critique of capitalism as a false religion within wider changes in the intellectual climate since *GS*. In particular, I want to contrast Catholic approaches to secularization in the 1960s with the conversation on secularization today. *GS* was written in the heyday of the “secularization thesis” that tended to see secularization as a disenchantment of the world. But rather than see the secular as a neutral realm stripped bare of transcendence, I think there has been a migration of the holy from the church to the world, such that capitalism, for example, is best understood not as devoid of gods but as a new type of—often idolatrous—religion.

anti-historicist neo-Scholasticism that was overturned at Vatican II was a thoroughly neo-Thomist tendency, led by Dominicans like Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange at the Angelicum. Komonchak’s article is, as the title indicates, about tensions *within the progressive majority* at Vatican II; he does not identify the regressive forces at Vatican II as neo-Augustinians. He complicates the dichotomy further by introducing a third position, again within the majority, which he calls “the Gospel *sine glossa*,” which represents neither Chenu’s Thomism nor Ratzinger’s Augustinianism.

27. “Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis,” Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida, July 24, 2013, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130724_gmg-omelia-aparecida.html.
28. It may be for this reason that the language of idolatry is more common among Latin American church leaders. In his 2014 Archbishop Romero Trust Lecture, for example, Rowan Williams quotes extensively from Romero and notes how often he returns to the theme of idolatry (Williams, “A Saint for the Whole People of God: Oscar Romero and the Ecumenical Future,” at <http://www.romerotrue.org.uk/documents/romero%20lectures/ART%20lecture%202014.pdf>).

The “secularization thesis” enjoyed a broad consensus among sociologists and others that, as Peter Berger puts it, “Modernization necessarily leads to a decline of religion, both in society and in the minds of individuals.”²⁹ The advance of science, capitalism, and the differentiation of society into separate religious and secular spheres was understood predominantly as a stripping away of belief in magical, transcendent forces, leaving a purely immanent residue behind. In Max Weber’s terms, the rationalization that characterizes modernity leads inexorably to disenchantment, the usual translation for Weber’s term *Entzauberung*, the loss of *Zauber*, or “magic.” Secularization in this sense could be celebrated or mourned or turned into an opportunity for the church—as it was by some theologians—but it was widely accepted as fact by sociologists of religion in the 1960s.

How far the notion of secularization as disenchantment penetrated the thinking of the Council Fathers is difficult to gauge precisely. I have already noted that in *GS* atheism is presented as a loss of belief, and economics and other areas are considered relatively autonomous and rightly differentiated from the religious sphere. If we look at the theological writing of some of the *periti* and others representative of the council’s majority, secularization as disenchantment becomes more explicit. The 1969 issue of *Concilium* entitled *Sacralization and Secularization*, for example, takes a version of disenchantment as its starting point. In the issue’s preface Anton Weiler declares that “the mentality of the human individual today is very different from that prevailing in the old cultures and their understanding of the ‘animated’ world. Modern man is faced with a world of ‘facts’ which have become neutralized.”³⁰ Religion is identified with a “supra-empirical” legitimation of social reality. The questions this issue of *Concilium* addresses are: “How did the supra-empirical legitimation first arise, how did it find expression, and how does it disappear?”³¹ In the issue’s first article, sociologist Leonardus Laeyendecker, drawing on the early work of Peter Berger, addresses these questions, pinning the “loss in social significance of the Christian supra-empirical definition of reality” on the modern differentiation of society.³² “We are seeing the rise of social segmentation and a plurality of societies. This makes it impossible, and

29. Peter L. Berger, “The Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview,” in *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, ed. Peter L. Berger (Washington: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1999) 1–18, at 2. This notion of secularization was never hegemonic. It was implicitly challenged in the United States by, for example, the debate over Robert Bellah’s notion of “civil religion,” touched off by his famous 1967 article “Civil Religion in America,” which indicated that “secular” things like nationalism could also be “religious” (Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America” in *American Civil Religion*, ed. Donald E. Jones and Russell E. Richey [San Francisco: Mellen Research University, 1990] 21–44, at 21; originally in *Daedalus* 96 [1967] 1–21). The debate over civil religion in the United States did not seem to have much effect on European scholars.

30. Anton Weiler, “Preface,” in *Sacralization and Secularization, Concilium*, vol. 47, ed. Roger Aubert (New York: Paulist, 1969) 1–6, at 2.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Leonardus Laeyendecker, “The Sociological Approach to Secularization” in *Sacralization and Secularization* 9–19, at 17.

inevitably so, to maintain one particular definition of reality as the exclusive vehicle of salvation.”³³ Differentiation is the key theme; globalization and the integration of markets and societies has not yet become an important trope.

Although secularization was understood as a disenchantment of the world, Catholic theologians did not simply accept the eventual disappearance of the Church and belief in God as an inevitable outcome. Indeed, secularization was seen by some progressive theologians as the ripe fruit of the Judeo-Christian tradition itself. As Henricus Fortmann explains in the issue of *Concilium* cited above, the world for ancient people was “animated,” filled with “numinous powers” that were experienced daily as a simple reality. “Our world, however, is neutral, a framework for research. . . . The outer world is no longer loaded with an ‘other’ reality. It has become a chain of ‘facts.’ And facts are there to be investigated in their causes and reactions.”³⁴ Fortmann attributes this change to the “monotheism of the Bible,” which removed God from residing in things and located God above. This process of secularization took a long time to mature, meandering through the Middle Ages with its cults of saints and relics. But finally in the modern period, the effort to keep God nearby has been broken. “The Bible (in its essence), the Church leaders (in their more enlightened moments), and science were at one on this point: this can no longer go on. The world has become neutral.”³⁵ Fortmann considers this a positive development, but still appeals to the possibility that, like the primitive man, the child, and the poet, the believer can still experience the divine that stands behind the mere “neutral facts.”³⁶

Marie-Dominique Chenu, a *peritus* at Vatican II and one of the major influences on *GS*, likewise thought that the desacralization of the world accompanying the end of Christendom should be embraced as an opportunity for the Church. For Chenu, the sacred is “what is put aside,” and he is glad to see that “whole fields of economic organizations, social relations, international co-existence and cultural values have thus found an autonomy of function and institutional character in a technological civilization.”³⁷ Writing in *Concilium* in 1966, Claude Geffré chides Chenu for establishing a false opposition of sacred and profane, but Geffré likewise writes of “the opportunity presented by desacralization,” provided it is understood in the right way:

Insofar as it coincides with a radical exposure of the illusions and idolatries of the “religious” consciousness, it may paradoxically serve the sacred element of authentic religion in which

33. Ibid. 16.

34. Henricus Fortmann, “Primitive Man: The Poet and the Believer,” in *Sacralization and Secularization* 21–26, at 22. Fortmann makes no distinction between “secularization,” “desacralization,” and related terms. “To describe this event we use various words which all come down to the same thing: secularization, demythologization, disenchantment, neutralization” (ibid. 23).

35. Ibid. 24.

36. Ibid. 25.

37. Marie-Dominique Chenu, quoted in Claude J. Geffré, O.P., “Desacralization and the Spiritual Life,” in *Spirituality in the Secular City*, *Concilium*, vol. 19 (New York: Paulist, 1966) 111–31, at 120.

the faith must be rooted. In this sense, the conquest of the universe by modern man, and therefore the decline of the sacred, falls in line with the process of desacralization that lies at the heart of our Judaeo-Christian religion.³⁸

Geffré continues to see secularization as a subtraction of enchantment: “Everything becomes ‘controllable’ in our desacralized universe and no mystery is left.”³⁹ The “growth in man’s rational approach goes hand in hand with man’s growing ability in production, enjoyment and technical transformation of the universe,”⁴⁰ but the question of meaning goes unanswered. Geffré therefore sees the imperative to “announce the Word of God to a humanity that has become autonomous and has stripped bare a certain amount of religious deviations.”⁴¹ For Geffré, the Word of God reveals a true element of the sacred in the profane that remains once the magical and idolatrous elements of the sacred are stripped away.

Edward Schillebeeckx likewise saw the process of secularization as the stripping away of the presence of magical forces from a material substrate, and he embraced it as the maturation of the biblical view of God and creation. For Schillebeeckx, however, the presence of God in the profane was not so much a remainder in material creation as it was a presence made in the process of what he called “hominization,” the impress of humanity on the brute facts of the natural world. As Schillebeeckx wrote in 1966, secularization is the movement from a theophanous world to a hominized world; nature now bears “the traces, not of God, but of *man*.”⁴² Through science and technology, the human person no longer bowed before the mysterious forces of nature but had come rather to dominate and control nature. Schillebeeckx wanted to affirm this movement toward the maturity of humankind. His interlocutor was the humanist, but not the “broad-minded gentleman” of the Renaissance. “The modern humanist is more profound, more integral, more serious. He is more matter of fact, sober and real. . . . Both in Marxist and existentialist circles, this humanism is generally framed within a perspective without God, in which all supraterrrestrial expectations are firmly excluded.”⁴³ Such serious and sober people had no time for the transcendent, anything that distracted from the real, empirically accessible world. Humanity had finally ceased trying to escape and instead took free responsibility for molding it toward human purposes.

Schillebeeckx had great respect for such humanism, but wanted to rescue it from its atheism. He regarded the biblical view of God as a “fundamental affirmation of the secularity of reality,”⁴⁴ of the fact, that is, that creation is not God. As Schillebeeckx wrote,

38. *Ibid.* 127.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*

42. Edward Schillebeeckx, *World and Church*, trans. N. D. Smith (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1971) 79, emphasis original; originally published as “Het leed der ervaring van Gods verborgenheid,” *Kerguma* 9.4 (1966) 5–34.

43. *Ibid.* 2.

44. *Ibid.* 86–87.

The true theological interpretation of and the directly raised response to the phenomenon of secularisation is therefore not disbelief or the secularisation of religion itself, but first and foremost a refusal to regard God as a factor *within this world*, the corner-stone of our universe, and a refusal to experience nature directly as *numinous*.⁴⁵

Secularization for Schillebeeckx is sweeping the world clean of idols. God, then, is located not in nature, but in the human heart. Nature reveals God, but “The course of nature,” Schillebeeckx writes, “tells us more because of God speaking within us than ever it could of itself.”⁴⁶ The human person does not encounter God first in the external world, but in the inward word of God in the heart, which gradually comes to visible manifestation through special revelation in history. The hominization of history through technological progress, then, need not imply the banishment of God from history, but only the banishment of idols.

IV. Secularization in the Contemporary Context

The intellectual context has changed since the 1960s. Existentialism now seems dated, superseded by postmodern thought. Already in 1966, when Schillebeeckx was taking on the centrality of “man” in existentialist thought, Michel Foucault was writing, “As the archeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end.”⁴⁷ The Marxists that remained in Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall tended to be of the decidedly postsecular kind, like Slavoj Žižek. The secularization thesis has furthermore fallen on hard times. Peter Berger, who in 1968 wrote that by “the 21st century, religious believers are likely to be found only in small sects, huddled together to resist a worldwide secular culture,”⁴⁸ has since confessed that “the world today . . . is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever. This means that a whole body of literature by historians and social scientists loosely labeled ‘secularization theory’ is essentially mistaken.”⁴⁹ Modern rationality by itself has not led to a decrease in religious belief; data compiled by Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart indicate that countries where faith in science is stronger also tend to have stronger religious faith.⁵⁰ As for the idea that modern differentiation within societies inevitably brings a decline in religious practice, social scientists today

45. Ibid. 82; emphasis original.

46. Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963) 8.

47. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon, 1970) 387. The French edition of the book, entitled *Les Mots et Les Choses*, appeared in 1966.

48. Peter L. Berger, “A Bleak Outlook Is Seen for Religion,” *New York Times*, February 25, 1968.

49. Berger, “Desecularization of the World” 2.

50. Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (New York: Cambridge University, 2004) 7–9, 67–69; see especially the figure on p. 68 that shows a positive correlation between faith in science and religious faith worldwide.

tend to believe that religion rises and falls in different times and places according to a whole range of specific factors.⁵¹ The fact that “the world as a whole now has more people with traditional religious views than ever before—and they constitute a growing proportion of the world’s population”⁵² is evidence that the secularization thesis was, ironically, more dogma than science.

I am less interested in the so-called “resurgence of religion”⁵³ in recent decades, however, than in the redefinition of religion in another area of scholarship. Beginning with Wilfred Cantwell Smith’s landmark book, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, which appeared in 1962 just as Vatican II commenced, a growing chorus of scholars questioned whether the category of religion can be confined to something like belief in a God or gods. One group of scholars has been occupied with doing *Genealogies of Religion*, to use the title of Talal Asad’s influential 1993 book,⁵⁴ showing how the religious–secular divide is a modern Western invention. Before modernity, there was no “religion” and no “secular” because the worship of God pervaded all aspects of life.⁵⁵

While this first group of scholars—sometimes called “constructivists”—has shown how malleable and contingent the distinction between “religious” and “secular” is, a second group of scholars—often called “functionalists”—has openly expanded the category of religion to include all sorts of phenomena that are often considered secular. “Functionalists prefer to define ‘religion’ not in terms of *what* is believed by the religious but in terms of *how* they believe it (that is in terms of the role belief plays in people’s lives).”⁵⁶ Functionalists follow a theme in Émile Durkheim’s work, in which the sacred–profane distinction depends entirely on the social function an object or rite plays. Anything can be a sacred object if it serves to reinforce social order. The national flag, for example, can be a sacred object—indeed the most sacred object in a society—even

51. Ibid. 10–11.

52. Ibid. 5. At the same time, Norris and Inglehart want to rescue some reformed version of the secularization thesis: they state that virtually all advanced industrial societies have been increasingly secularized over the past 50 years. Their thesis is that people become less religious when they feel less vulnerable.

53. For example, see Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott, and Timothy Samuel Shah, *God’s Century: Resurgent Religion and Global Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011).

54. Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1993).

55. In Smith’s words, there is no “closely equivalent concept in any culture that has not been influenced by the modern West” (Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* [New York: Macmillan, 1962] 18–19). I have done an extensive genealogy of the term “religion” in my book *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (New York: Oxford University, 2009) 57–122. For a more recent summary of the scholarship on the history of the concept “religion,” see Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University, 2012).

56. Peter B. Clarke and Peter Byrne, *Religion Defined and Explained* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1993) 7.

though it does not explicitly refer to a supra-empirical being. Also influential to this line of thinking has been the recovery of Carl Schmitt's work since the 1990s. Schmitt famously used the term "political theology" to diagnose the transfer of concepts in modernity from theology to the theory of the sovereign state. The sacred did not disappear in modernity, but was transferred to so-called "secular" structures, such that, to use Schmitt's examples, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent sovereign lawgiver, or the miracle became the exception in jurisprudence.⁵⁷ A host of "postsecular" thinkers have updated Schmitt's insights for the present. Yale legal theorist Paul Kahn, for example, takes Schmitt as his model in arguing that in the United States, ritualized nationalism and talk of sacrifice and states of emergency reveal the theological basis of so-called "secular" politics. As Kahn writes, "the state is not the secular arrangement that it purports to be. A political life is not a life stripped of faith and the experience of the sacred, regardless of what we may believe about the legal separation of church and state."⁵⁸ Politics is sacred not simply because Christianity continues to influence the state, but rather because the sacred has migrated to the state, which plays the role that the Body of Christ played in premodern Christendom.

The point is not that there is no such thing as secularization, but rather that the contemporary religious–secular distinction does not track the sacred–profane distinction as scholars in the 1960s used to think. In the words of sociologist of secularization José Casanova,

The modern secular is by no means synonymous with the "profane," nor is the "religious" synonymous with the modern "sacred." . . . In this respect, modern secularization entails a certain profanation of religion through its privatization and individualization and a certain sacralization of the secular spheres of politics (sacred nation, sacred citizenship, sacred constitution), science (temples of knowledge), and economics (through commodity fetishism).⁵⁹

An article entitled "The Sacred and the Profane in Consumer Behavior" typifies this approach. In it, marketing professors Russell Belk, Melanie Wallendorf, and John Sherry analyze social scientific data on consumer behavior and conclude that what

57. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1985) 36. To use Schmitt's oft-quoted lines, "All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development—in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver—but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts. The exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology."

58. Paul W. Kahn, *Political Theology: Four New Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (New York: Columbia University, 2011) 18.

59. José Casanova, "The Secular, Secularizations, and Secularisms," in *Rethinking Secularism*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (New York: Oxford University, 2011) 54–74, at 65.

characterizes the sacred—objects set apart and accorded reverence—is also typical of consumer behavior, although such commodities are usually considered profane because they have no connection to formal “religion.”⁶⁰ The authors argue that “two processes at work in contemporary society are the secularization of religion and the sacralization of the secular. Consumer behavior shapes and reflects these processes,”⁶¹ even though the scholarly interpretation of consumer behavior has only recently begun to cross the artificially constructed boundary between secular and religious.⁶²

Economics is perhaps the area in which the breakdown of the neat distinction between enchanted, sacred religion on the one hand and the disenchanting, profane secular on the other is most apparent. As George Ritzer has demonstrated in his work on the “new means of consumption”—in which shopping and entertainment are blurred and “cathedrals of consumption” are constructed—Weber’s assumption that greater rationalization inevitably brings disenchantment is false.⁶³ The corporate systemization of commodified enchantment shows how permeable the concepts of enchantment and rationalization are. Ritzer’s blurring of shopping and entertainment is also useful because it demonstrates that one can seek enchantment in things without actually having the money to buy them. The erosion of the wages of working people in the United States, for example, has not apparently eroded the *desire* for things or the *belief* in the “free market.”

The analysis of capitalist enchantment is not new. Karl Marx famously wrote about “commodity fetishism,” the attribution of mystical qualities to material goods.⁶⁴ Norman O. Brown declared in his 1959 psychoanalysis of history that the “money complex” is the “heir to and substitute for the religious complex, an attempt to find God in things.”⁶⁵ New since the 1960s is the historicization and consequent blurring of the religious–secular divide. An article by David Loy entitled “The Religion of the Market” provides one example:

60. Russell W. Belk, Melanie Wallendorf, and John F. Sherry Jr., “The Sacred and the Profane in Consumer Behavior: Theodicy on the Odyssey,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 16 (1989) 1–38.

61. *Ibid.* 1.

62. *Ibid.* 32.

63. George Ritzer, *Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Continuity and Change in the Cathedrals of Consumption*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2010) 7–9, 73–150.

64. In explaining how commodities come to be endowed with a will and soul of their own, Marx comments, “In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men’s hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities”; Karl Marx, *Capital*, trans. Ben Fowkes, 3 vols. (New York: Vintage, 1977) 1:165.

65. Norman O. Brown, *Life against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University, 1985) 252.

Religion is notoriously difficult to define. If, however, we adopt a functionalist view and understand religion as what grounds us by teaching us what the world *is*, and what our *role* in the world is, then it becomes obvious that traditional religions are fulfilling this role less and less, because that function is being supplanted—or overwhelmed—by other belief-systems and value-systems. Today the most powerful alternative explanation of the world is science, and the most attractive value-system has become consumerism. Their academic offspring is economics, probably the most influential of the “social sciences.” In response, this paper will argue that our present economic system should also be understood as our religion, because it has come to fulfill a religious function for us.⁶⁶

Economist Robert H. Nelson’s 2001 book, *Economics as Religion*, is another example of this approach, though with a much more positive assessment of the outcome.⁶⁷ More recently, Philip Goodchild’s book *Theology of Money* argues that money as guarantor of all value holds the same place in modern society that God occupied in medieval times.⁶⁸

Although the idea of economic behavior as “religious” is increasingly common, only recently have significant empirical studies been undertaken to support the idea. One example is an article by researchers from the universities of Tel Aviv, New York, and Duke entitled “Brands: The Opiate of the Nonreligious Masses?”⁶⁹ In a series of studies, the researchers found that those subjects with strong traditional religious ties were much less likely to choose name brands for products that are used as a form of self-expression. The authors conclude that consumer behavior and brand loyalty function as substitutes for traditional religion.

The point again is that the preponderance of the idea of secularization as disenchantment that prevailed in the 1960s has been put into question. To read the signs of the times today, I think we need to entertain the possibility that the realm of economics is not autonomous and drained of the sacred; secularization is not the disappearance of the sacred, but the migration of a sense of the sacred from the church to other realms, from the sacraments to commodities. The people standing ready to burst into Best Buy at midnight on Thanksgiving are not disenchanting. That this should be the case is nothing more startling than the basic biblical insight that people are spontaneously worshipping creatures, and our devotions regularly alight on all sorts of things that are not

66. David R. Loy, “The Religion of the Market,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65 (1997) 275–90, at 275.

67. Robert H. Nelson, *Economics as Religion: From Samuelson to Chicago and Beyond* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2001). See also Robert H. Nelson, *Reaching for Heaven on Earth: The Theological Meaning of Economics* (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991).

68. Philip Goodchild, *Theology of Money* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2009).

69. Ron Shachar, Tülin Erdem, Keisha M. Cutright, and Gavin J. Fitzsimons, “Brands: The Opiate of the Nonreligious Masses?,” *Marketing Science* 30 (2011) 92–110. The authors recognize the possibility that their research “may provide interesting insights for marketers and spiritual leaders alike in converting people from a brand to God or from God to a brand” (107).

God. The biblical critique of idolatry, in other words, anticipated Durkheim and Schmitt by many centuries. Pope Francis need not have had any direct contact with the kind of scholarship I have highlighted to intuit that the Bible's critique of idolatry is as pertinent today as it ever was.⁷⁰

V. Conclusion

So is Pope Francis turning his back on Vatican II, returning to the days when the world was to be condemned rather than embraced? Three comments are in order. First, Francis's comments are as pertinent to those inside the Church as outside. There is no sense that the Church is somehow a refuge from the idolatry of the world. The "entice-ment of money" is something about which Francis warns his own bishops.⁷¹ Idolatry critique is first and foremost self-critique. Second, as we have seen, Francis rejects simple optimism—what he in *EG* calls "a crude and naïve trust in the goodness of those wielding economic power" (no. 54)—but he also rejects pessimism. What Francis counsels instead of either optimism or pessimism is hope, which is quite different from optimism. Francis recognizes that "the 'dragon,' evil, is present in our history, but it does not have the upper hand. The one with the upper hand is God, and God is our hope!"⁷² Third and finally, there is a sense of hopefulness embedded in the critique of idolatry itself. For the charge of idolatry recognizes the search for God that is rooted in every human heart; we are spontaneously worshipping creatures, because the longing for God is at the core of what it means to be human.

In its section on the "Community of Mankind," *GS* recognizes that the aim of all human life is God: "For having been created in the image of God, Who 'from one man has created the whole human race and made them live all over the face of the earth' (Acts 17:26), all men are called to one and the same goal, namely, God Himself" (no. 24). The council is here quoting from Paul's speech to the Athenians in Acts 17.

70. Though my purpose in this article is not to construct a genealogy of Pope Francis's thought, it is interesting that in his interview with *La Vanguardia*, Francis does indicate that he recognizes the changes in the intellectual climate since the 1960s. In response to a question about atheism, he says, "Hubo un avance del ateísmo en la época más existencial, quizás sartriana. Pero después vino un avance hacia búsquedas espirituales, de encuentro con Dios, en mil maneras, no necesariamente las religiosas tradicionales" (There was an advance of atheism in the more existential, perhaps Sartrean, era. But afterward there was a movement toward spiritual quests, of encounter with God in a thousand ways, not necessarily the traditional religious ones) ("Entrevista al Papa Francisco: 'La secesión de una nación hay que tomarla con pinzas,'" *El Sismógrafo*, June 13, 2014, <http://ilsismografo.blogspot.com/2014/06/vaticano-entrevista-al-papa-francisco.html>).

71. Pope Francis, "Profession of Faith with the Bishops of the Italian Episcopal Conference," May 23, 2013, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130523_omelia-professio-fidei-cei.html.

72. "Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis," Shrine of Our Lady of Aparecida, July 24, 2013, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130724_gmg-omelia-aparecida.html.

According to Acts, while staying in Athens Paul “was deeply distressed to see that the city was full of idols” (17:16).⁷³ He proceeds to call them to repent of their idolatry, but he does so sympathetically, because he sees in their idolatry an inchoate groping for the true God. Paul calls them *δεισιδαμονεστέρτους*, literally “quite demon-fearing,” which the NRSV translates as “extremely religious” (17:22). He has seen their altar dedicated to an unknown god, and he wants to make God known to them. God has created humans

so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For “In him we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your own poets have said, “For we too are his offspring.” Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. (17:27–29)

Paul thus deftly critiques the Athenians’ idolatry while simultaneously seeing in it evidence for the desire for God that is the core of our common humanity. This combination of critique and sympathy, it seems to me, represents the spirit of Vatican II: a church open to the world, proclaiming the Good News for the healing of our common wounds.

Author biography

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73. All biblical quotations are from the NRSV.