research so as “to enter into dialogue with non-Catholic exegetes and prepare the way to an adult and mature Christian faith.” The bishop of Mainz, Bishop Hermann Volz, one of the spokesmen of the anti-Roman party, asserted that revelation is expressed first of all in the Church’s liturgy: “In the sacred liturgy, sacred scripture is incensed and not tradition, and in this hall we are solemnly expounding sacred scripture and not tradition.”

After the debate was closed, on October 6, a new version of the schema was distributed to the council fathers, who were asked to submit their observations before January 31, 1965. In the final intersession they would continue to get requests for changes and additions, but the Doctrinal Commission, especially through the efforts of Florit and his trusted theologian Betti, did not modify the planned approach.

The Coetus Internationalis Patrum [International Group of Fathers] sent to their supporters a ten-page critique of the schema, asking them to vote for it only on the condition that the indicated amendments be incorporated. The reservations pertained above all to the relations between scripture and tradition (art. 9), the inerrancy of the scriptures (art. 11), and the historicity of the gospels (art. 19). Despite these requests, the Theological Commission made no revision of the text. The vote on the schema took place at the beginning of the fourth session, between September 20 and 22, 1965.

9. Gaudium et spes: The council’s “promised land”

a) The Church in the contemporary world

Even before the opening of the council, John XXIII had wanted it to deal with the relations between the Church and the modern world. In a television interview the pope had posed beside a large globe on which were written four words that summed up his speech: Ecclesia Christi lumen gentium [The Church of Christ is the light to the nations].

When, on December 4, 1962, towards the end of the first session, Cardinal Suenens, citing John XXIII, had proposed to the general assembly that the Church should study its relations as a whole with the world, the pontiff had created the Coordinating Commission and entrusted to the same Suenens the job of developing a new schema that would collect the Church’s teachings that were directly related with the problems of the modern world. In its first meeting, in January 1963, the commission decided that the new schema would be entitled On the actual presence of the Church in the contemporary world and would have six chapters: on man’s vocation; on the human person in society; on matrimony and the family; on human development and cultural growth; on the socio-economic order; and on the community of nations and peace.

In his capacity as promoter of the schema, Cardinal Suenens proposed that the composition of the text be entrusted to a joint ad hoc commission, made up of members of the Theological Commission and of the Commission for the Lay Apostolate, with Cardinals Ottaviani and Cento as co-presidents.

The work that began in February was interrupted by the death of John XXIII and was suspended for a time, until a number of experts of the anti-Roman persuasion were added to the commission during the second session.

The composition of the schema was entrusted to a restricted group with a progressive orientation. Among them were Bishop Guano of Livorno, president, and the Redemptorist Häring as secretary. There were many working meetings, and then on July 3, 1962, Paul VI approved a 29-page draft, to which a 57-page supplement was subsequently added; the document was distributed to the council fathers on the September 30, 1964, during the third session. Never was a conciliar document awaited


like schema XIII, which was “supposed to be the first ‘proving ground’ of the Church’s capacity to enter into dialogue with the world.”

The “star” schema of the third session, that began with the words “Gaudium et spes, “the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age,” was described by Father Congar as “the ‘promised land’ of the council.” The field would be prepared by a series of conferences like that of Father Schillebeeckx on September 16 at the Dutch Documentation Center DO-C. “In the economy of salvation, the world is by definition in a state of implicit Christianity…. The Church must recognize that the soil she is tilling in schema 13 is not a sacred but a holy land.”

On Sunday, October 5, eight hundred bishops who were present in Rome for the council proceedings attended the showing of the film The Gospel According to Matthew by the Marxist director Pier Paolo Pasolini. The showing had been sponsored by the Ufficio Cattolico Internazionale del Cinema (International Catholic Office for Cinema), which a month before had awarded Pasolini’s film the prize for “best religious film of the year.”

b) First skirmishes in the hall

Finally, on Tuesday, March 20, 1965, the schema reached the assembly. On the eve of the beginning of the debate, Father Daniélou held a crowded press conference in which he mentioned that the promoter of the schema was Cardinal Suenens, who was convinced that it would be unthinkable to conclude the council without examining the fundamental problems of today’s world.

The text was presented by Bishop Emilio Guano on behalf of the commission that had prepared the schema. The document—Guano said—set out “to promote (…) dialogue with all men in order to listen to them in their way of seeing their situations and problems” and to make clear “in what way the Church is involved in the progress of our time, what Christians can and must give as their contribution toward

184 Cf. G. Alberigo, A Brief History, 78.
185 Fesquet, Drama, 292.
186 Ibid., 309.
187

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the solution of the major problems confronting men in this hour of history.” The idea underlying the intervention was that humanity was in a period of relentless “progress” and that the Church, having fallen behind, had to find the way and the forms in which “to update itself and to adapt to the times.”

Among the first to speak was, as always, Cardinal Ruffini who, although congratulating the authors of the schema, lamented the frequent repetitions that uselessly burdened the text. Among the non-intelligible things, the Cardinal of Palermo cited the sentence of the schema that stated, in typically evolutionist terms, that human nature is the apex of visible creation, towards which, according to God’s design, the evolution of the world was following its trajectory through untold ages.

The dignity of man is spoken of seven times without mentioning the redemption. The word vocation recurs incessantly without any definition of it, and it is used in different senses. The same page talks about the fight against injustice five times. This is a sermon rather than a conciliar constitution! There are things that are said wrongly or at least that I do not understand. For example on the fourth line of page ten it says that human nature appeared as the result of an evolution of countless years. I don’t like that, because to say that human nature was prepared by evolution is contrary to the Church’s doctrine. On page 15, line 25, it says that the faithful must give proof of intelligence and prudence so as to put their conscience to the test. This is said against a background of “situation ethics.” It seems to say in fact that conscience ought be the norm, when, on the contrary, the Church’s principles are.

On October 20, Cardinal Lercaro intervened in opposition. “Let us discuss this schema without delay but also without haste. It would be a mistake to take its defects as a pretext for discarding it. This text is situated along the spiritual line of the message of Paul VI. It is enough to serve as a basis for discussion. Experience shows that only discussion makes schemas better.”

On November 4 Lercaro intervened a second time on schema XIII to assert that the Church should manifest a more open attitude toward the
world with regard to poverty, renouncing if necessary some “riches” from past, such as the scholastic system in the philosophical and theological field and particular academic and educational institutions.200 Within this vision, he looked forward to future cooperation between the bishop-teacher and the layman-theologian.

Cardinal Ruffini deemed the intervention so serious that he was prompted to write directly to the pope: “What His Eminence Cardinal Lecaro declared in his intervention yesterday seemed to be ‘abnormal’, paradoxical, and I would say absurd, because it was contrary to our traditions in the matter of study and education.”202

c) Teilhard de Chardin’s presence at the council

Two lines of the progressive battle array came together over schema XIII in the council, the “optimistic” French line, which was tinged with humanism and Maritainism, and the “pessimistic” German line that was sensitive to the entreaties of protestantism, in particular of the school of Karl Barth. Archbishop Volk, on behalf of seventy fathers, most of them German-speaking,203 cited the Lutheran theology of the cross, asserting that the schema did not sufficiently take sin into account. The harshest critic was Cardinal John Carmel Heenan,204 archbishop of Westminster, who had already set up an opposition group called “St. Paul’s Conference.” He declared that the schema was “unworthy of an ecumenical council of the Church”205 and proposed to take it away from the commission that had dealt with it thus far. “It would be better to say nothing rather than these banalities and these empty words.... This pitiful schema will make the world laugh.... Even when completed with additions, it would remain insufficient and ambiguous. Without the additions, then, it would be downright harmful.”206 Either Cardinal Lecaro or Cardinal Döpfner proposed putting off discussion of the schema until the following session so as to be able to examine it more calmly.

The discussion of schema XIII revealed how strong Teilhard de Chardin’s influence was on the council.207 The name of the French paleontologist frequently resounded in the hall. On October 22, Archbishop Hurley208 of Durban, saluted “the illustrious son of the Church, Teilhard de Chardin,” and compared his eschatology with that of St. Paul.209 On October 26, Bishop Otto Spülbeck,210 bishop of Meissen, stressed the great influence of Teilhard de Chardin on the modern scientific world, because, “he spoke our scientific language; we believe also that he understood our problems and, therefore, we turn to him to obtain help in the religious questions that arise from our studies.”211 The German bishop ended by asserting that “the difficulties and anxieties of many theologians unfortunately still stand in the way” of the Church’s desired progress in this field, “something that goes back to the time of Galileo, four hundred years ago, and for which we are not completely without fault.”212

On October 23, Father Benedikt Reetz, superior general of the Benedictine Congregation of Beuron, in Germany, and a member of the Conciliar Commission for Religious, openly defended the monks against the criticisms that had aimed at them in the hall by some fathers. He said:

As a monk and abbot I hardly know the world, but perhaps those forty monks sent to England by Pope Gregory the Great in the early seventh century to “make the Angels angels”—and one of those forty


203 Ibid., 318–322.

204 AS III/5:319.


was Augustine, who became the first bishop of the Angles—perhaps they too, I say, scarcely knew the world.

I tremble at the idea of addressing the council because obviously those who have been inside a convent since their childhood know nothing of the world. And yet St. Gregory the Great sent to England the monk Augustine to convert it; and he became bishop of Canterbury. And yet St. Benedict, who obviously knew nothing of the world, is about to be proclaimed “patron of Europe” by Paul VI.213

Father Reetz then cited numerous passages to show that scripture speaks of the world “in a twofold sense, that is, as a world that has been wounded by sin and as a world that should be consecrated in all its parts.”214 He asked, therefore, that this twofold aspect be made clear in the introduction to the schema.

His final observation was that the philosophical system of Father Teilhard de Chardin, which is marked by “an exaggerated optimism,” ought to be kept out of the schema, because it does not take into due consideration “death, sin, the devil, and the resurrection itself.”215 Dom Prou also,216 the abbot of Solesmes, criticized on October 16 the confusion between nature and grace, the natural and the supernatural order, with an implicit reference to the disciples of Teilhard, in primis [especially] de Lubac. “Actually,” de Lubac commented in his diary, “he does not blame Teilhard, but rather the theory—a daring one, in my opinion—of the Chenu-Schillebeeckx school, which, on the contrary, claims to speak in the name of St. Thomas.”217

Meanwhile a brochure by Father Meinville, entitled “Il progressismo cristiano, errori e deviazioni” (“Christian Progressivism: Errors and Deviations”), was circulating in the council. Among other things, it denounced the responsibilities of heterodox authors like Maritain, Mounier, Teilhard in the drift of contemporary thought.218

10. A new vision of the Christian family

a) Going beyond Casti connubii

The real drama that the West, and especially Europe, would experience in the decades after the council would be the “fall in the birth-rate.” Many council fathers, nevertheless, accepted the Malthusian suggestions in the sixties that “prophesied” a catastrophe for mankind if it did not put into effect a rigid “control of births.” Through the “pill,” science offered the means of accomplishing this, and the Church would have to prove that she was sensitive to the demands of the times.

Article 21 of the fourth chapter of schema XIII was dedicated to “The dignity of matrimony and the family.” The text, however, departed from the teaching of the encyclicals Aretæum19 of Leo XIII and Casti connubii220 of Pius XI and from Pius XII’s teaching in the talks that he gave to married couples from 1939 to 1943.221 As a matter of fact, it avoided the traditional distinction between the primary and secondary ends of matrimony and, de facto, placed the bond of conjugal love before the procreation of children, leaving open the possibility of “birth-control,” as something left up to the conscience of the spouses. In 1963, Doctor John Rock, in a much discussed book, The Time Has Come, had maintained the need for a new approach of the churches, and especially of the Catholic Church, to the topic of birth control.222

Mediterraneo, 1965).

214 Ibid., 376.
215 Ibid., 377.
216 Ibid., 519–520.
217 De Lubac, Quaderni, 689.
Louis Janssens appeared, in which he discussed Rock’s book and said that perhaps, truly, “the time had come.” Besides the Belgians, two Canadian cardinals were moving along these lines: Bishop Roy of Quebec, and Archbishop Léger of Montreal. Roy had as an “expert” [peritus] a well-known, dedicated Thomist, Charles de Koninck, a professor at Laval University, who argued for the lawfulness, in some cases, of contraceptive methods.

John XXIII, on Suenens’ advice, had created in 1963 a commission to study the problem. Paul VI had reported news about it on June 23, 1964, in a speech to the cardinals and had requested that the council address the subject only in general terms.

The new concept of morality was presented on October 27 by the Patriarch Maximos IV Saigh [Sayegh], who asserted that the Middle Ages, a period of infancy for mankind, were over, and that the world was now entering into an age of maturity.

Does not this state of mind of today’s society perhaps demand a revision of the presentation of the teaching of morality? ... The current teaching is excessively marked by the legalism of a bygone era and thoroughly imbued with Roman law. Now, our Christian morality must have a Christocentric character with an expression of


226 Charles de Koninck (1906–1965), Belgian-Canadian philosopher and theologian, founder of the so-called “Laval School” of philosophy. From 1939 to 1956 he was the dean of the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Laval in Quebec.


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love and of freedom. It must educate each individual to a sense of personal and communal responsibility. Consequently, it is imperative to have a profound revision of our disciplines—which on the other hand are changing in nature. Many things from the good old days, accepted by our simple, pious grandfathers, are no longer so today. Let us mention for example the treatment given in our catechisms to the Commandments of the Church. According to our catechisms, skipping Sunday Mass once without a reason, or failing to fast once on Friday, is a mortal sin that consequently merits eternal damnation. Is that reasonable? Nowadays, how many adult Catholics believe it?

"Maximos IV was applauded at length" by the progressive sectors of the assembly. The bishop of Cuernavaca Méndez Arceo intervened to say that he was in complete agreement with him.

One of the principal signs of these times is the growth of the sense of responsibility and of freedom. It is necessary for the Church not to appear only as a defender of religious liberty, but also of freedom in general, wherever it is found. It is necessary to preach the spirit of freedom and love. Many of our positions are anachronistic. Let us revise them and let us insist on the gospel law, since there is the impression that this is less important than the rest. What a nasty display it is to give the impression of having to brandish moral sin in order to fill up our churches! Let us center everything on the essentials, that is, on Paschal joy.

When the debate started on October 29, Cardinal Ruffini was the first to speak, in the order of seniority. He expressed his disapproval of the schema which stated “that the final word on the number of children remains with the spouses themselves,” and described this teaching as very difficult to accept, “obscure, and full of extremely dangerous ambiguities.” After he cited a pertinent passage from St. Augustine, Cardinal Ruffini added:

228 AS III/5:567–569 at 568.
229 Festucc. Drama, 461–462
It is clear, venerable fathers, that Augustine's times were not much different from ours. Licentiousness and lustfulness were rife even then. But the Holy Doctor, a very faithful herald of the Church, did not remain silent with his severe disapproval. We too, as we speak to the men of the modern world, must not refrain from suppressing vices that are contrary to the sanctity of matrimony.

On the next day, Bishop Juan Hervás of Ciudad Real (Spain), a member of the Conciliar Commission on the Sacraments, speaking on behalf of 126 council fathers from all over the world, denounced the naturalistic and materialistic spirit of the schema.

In order to be positive, the bishop said, the document should have begun "by praising the virtues and merits of those spouses who are seeking in marriage their own sanctification or, at least, the faithful fulfillment of the natural law." Special praise should have been given in the schema to those married couples "who deny their own comfort in the imitation of Christ and receive the children whom God gives them with understanding, faith, and joy, as a gift of the creator, while they patiently bear arduous labors and the derision of the world." "Again and again the text says that the number of children should be regulated by the Christian prudence of the spouses, and this is good.... Yet little is said, and indeed rather timidly, about supernatural faith, about confidence in divine providence and about the love and acceptance of the cross—all of which should illuminate Christian prudence. We are not drawing up here a document that is philosophical, or merely technical or scientific, but one that is Christian!"

b) The ends of matrimony

The intervention that created the greatest stir was the discourse of Cardinal Suñens on October 29. In a forceful tone he asserted:

May I be permitted to express the recommendations that this commission should conduct an extensive investigation among leading moralists, scholars, and university faculty members from different disciplines, laypeople, both men and women, and among Christian spouses.

The first work of this commission is situated along the line of the faith and should consist of this to find out whether until now we have brought sufficiently to light the aspects of the Church's teaching on marriage.

...It may be that we have accentuated the verse from scripture: "Increase and multiply," to the point of obscuring the other divine command, "And the two shall be one flesh." (.) It will be up to the commission to tell us whether we have not overemphasized the first end, which is procreation, to the detriment of an equally imperative purpose, which is growth in the marital union.

In the same way, it is up to the commission to respond to the immense problem posed by the current demographic explosion and by overpopulation in many regions of the world. For the first time we must proceed to make such an examination in the light of the faith. The topic is difficult, but the world is awaiting, more or less consciously, for the Church to speak her mind in this area and to be "light for the nations."

...The second work of the commission is situated along the line of scientific progress and a more in-depth knowledge of natural ethics. The commission must examine whether the classical doctrine, especially that of the manuals, sufficiently takes into account the new data of today's science. We have made progress since Aristotle and have discovered the complexity of reality in which the biological component interacts with the psychological aspect, the conscious with the unconscious. Now possibilities are constantly being discovered in man, in his power to direct the course of nature. From this results a deeper consciousness of the unity of man, both in his essence as an incarnate spirit and in the dynamism of his whole life, a unity that is like the heart of Thomist anthropology; another result is a more exact appreciation of his reasoning power over the world that is entrusted to him. Who cannot see that in this way we may be led to further research into the problem of what is "secondary or contrary to nature"? Let us follow the progress of science. I entreat you, Brothers. Let us avoid a new "Galileo trial." One is enough for the Church.
After listening to this intervention, Cardinal Ruffini could not refrain from pounding his fist on the table out of indignation, and two days later he unburdened himself to Cardinal Cicognani, the Secretary of State, describing Suenens' remarks as "horrendous" and demanding the removal of the moderator. "It seems that the concept of matrimony, as we have understood it until now, dogmatically and morally," he wrote, "has to change, at least in practice. But is it possible that the Church was mistaken until now, and that adaptation to today's society forces us to declare that what was always held to be immoral is [now] in keeping with morality?" 238

Bishop Helder Câmara, in contrast, expressed his full enthusiasm for the primate of Belgium: "He has said everything that one could possibly dream of hearing on the subject of birth-control, including the courage to declare—he, a cardinal of the Holy Church, a moderator of the council, right there in St. Peter's Basilica: 'let us not repeat the Galileo trial!" 239

Suenens had asked Câmara for a "supportive" intervention, for which the Brazilian Archbishop Fernando Gomes dos Santos 240 had been selected, but then he did not take the floor. The "claque" [paid applause] for "Padre Miguel" had also been organized by the same Câmara. "He had notified me," the latter writes, "and we acted in such a way that his pioneering position was warmly applauded in the basilica. Once again he appeared as the leader who opened up the way for us." 241

The reporter for Le Monde commented:

Paul VI, who did not share the positions of the progressives on subjects of natural morality, was still upset and in a stormy audience with Suenens reprimanded him for his lack of judgment. 242 About a week later Suenens said that he had to reply "to certain reactions of public opinion," and explained that the decision was in the hands of the "supreme magisterium." 243

On October 30, Cardinal Ottaviani 244 with an intervention that was striking because of its personal note—something rare in his interventions, which were always rigorously doctrinal—addressed the council fathers as follows: "The priest who is talking to you is the eleventh of a family of twelve children. His father was a workingman, a laborer, not the boss of a laborer, but a workingman, and despite this he never doubted providence, and never thought about limiting the number of his children, even though there were difficulties. Do we intend, perhaps, to forget Our Lord's words: 'Behold the birds of the air... consider the lilies of the field' (Mt 6:26, 28)?" 245

Cardinal Ottaviani's allocution was followed immediately by Cardinal Browne's, which explained in a crystal-clear way the traditional idea of matrimony. 246

In the doctrine on matrimony, the teachings originating both from magisterial teaching and from the classical schools of theology are certain:

The primary end, the primary end of the work (finis primarius operis), as they say, is the generation and education of children;

The secondary end is twofold: a) the mutual help, or the mutual services rendered by the spouses to each other in their domestic partnership; b) the remedy to concupiscence.

But, some say, it is necessary to assign a place to marital love also.

No doubt, but in order to assign a place to it, one needs to distinguish between the love of friendship, according to which a person wills

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238 Câmara, Lettres Conciliaires, 2:696.


240 Câmara, Lettres Conciliaires, 2:696–697.


240 As III/6;379–381 at 381.

241 Ibid., 85–86.

240 Ibid., 85.
and procures the good for a friend as to another self, and the love of concupiscence, according to which a person desires and procures a good for himself.

In the marital partnership, the love that is most anxiously desired so that the spouses' fervor might be steadfast, lasting, and profoundly happy is a love of conjugal friendship of the man and the woman for one another.

In marital life, and especially in the marital act, there is also a sensory delight that the spouse may desire for its own sake insofar as it is united to a decent marital act and that the other party can desire in the same way insofar as it is united to the same act.

The natural course of things in marital life is such that when one of the spouses notices that the other is dominated by the sensory love of concupiscence, his love of friendship for him diminishes to the same extent.

We must therefore be prudent when we defend the rights of conjugal love. It is necessary to make the necessary distinctions so that conjugal love may be fully and virtuously established.

Because this virtuous quality exists in marital life, the spouses must pay attention to the so-called goods of marriage, namely the generation and education of children, fidelity which is preserved by rendering the marital debt, and the sacrament whereby marital life, which is already virtuous on the natural level, is made holy.

Because the marital act is naturally licit, it is enough to intend to preserve the good of fidelity by rendering the marital debt. To render the marital debt as one ought presupposes that the marital act observes the laws of nature but it does not require that it be performed during the period of the spouse's actual fertility. It can be performed legitimately in the so-called infertile periods.

There is no doubt whatsoever that all this belongs to the treasury of the common doctrine of the great theologians and that it is proposed to us in its essential elements in the documents of the magisterium and in particular in the encyclicals Arcanumum of Leo XIII, Casti connubii of Pius XI, and in the addresses of Pius XII to obstetricians and physicians.²⁶⁷

Unfortunately the family morality formulated in the chapter "The dignity of matrimony and of the family" in Gaudium et spes would incorporate the suggestions of the innovators, rather than those of the defenders of traditional morality. It resulted in an unfortunate synthesis of contrary tendencies.²⁴⁸

II. Marxism and communism are again discussed

Marxism and communism were at the center of the debate during the third session, on which Paul VI's encyclical (published two months previously on August 6, 1964) weighed heavily. In it the pontiff decried the ideological systems that denied God and oppressed the Church in the world, yet he hoped for "the eventual possibility of a dialogue between these men and the Church, and a more fruitful one than is possible in the present, when we can only express our justifiable complaints and repudiations."²⁷⁰ “For the first time,” a contemporary historian observed, “the policy of dialogue with non-believers and socialist regimes entered into an encyclical.”²⁷⁰

In the general examination of the conciliar schema, which left out all reference to communism, many of the fathers touched on the subject with concern.

On October 22, 1964, either Bishop Stimpfl²⁶⁵ of Augusta, in Germany, or Bishop Barbieri²⁶⁷ of Cassano Ionio, in Italy, forcefully requested that the question of communism be addressed. “The main purpose of this council is pastoral,” said Bishop Barbieri, “and it may be necessary to avoid condemnations: but it would be a scandal for many believers if the council were to give the impression that it was afraid to condemn the greatest crime of our age, scientific and practical atheism, which is worse in itself and because of its consequences, on the moral and spiritual level, than the atomic bomb itself.”²⁶⁸

²⁶⁷ Monsignor Philippe Delhaye, one of the four periti who worked on his report, described the document as "une synthèse tenant une moyenne entre plusieurs tendances" ["a synthesis holding a middle position between two tendencies"] (Vatican II: L'Eglise dans le monde de ce temps [Paris: Cerf, 1967], 2:421).
²⁶⁹ A. Riccardi, Il Vaticano e Mosca, op. cit., 269.
²⁷⁰ AS III/5: 324–327.