Technicians of Human Dignity
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On October 11, 1965, almost three years to the day after the opening of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI offered an address to the General Assembly of the United Nations. The timing of the address was strategically important. It was scheduled during the last of Vatican II’s official working sessions. The council participants, including some 2,200 bishops, hundreds of theological periti (official expert advisors), and many dozens of outside observers, had met for several months every fall since 1962, when Paul’s predecessor, Pope John XXIII, had convened the council. Although some of Pope Paul’s allies advised against leaving the Vatican during a period of official convocation, Paul understood the advantages of making the trip while the council was still in session: the visibility of his trip to New York would be amplified by the fact that television and radio audiences around the world were already held in rapt attention by the council’s “elegant, elaborate, colorful, and magnificently choreographed public ceremonies,” which stood out so sharply against the ordinary affairs of the church.
Paul's address came on the eve of his final push to complete and ratify a document known as Schema XII—the document that would eventually be known as *Gaudium et spes* (hope and joy) or, more officially, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church and the Modern World. It would be a mistake to characterize the Pastoral Constitution as the culmination of the council: there were simply too many major and minor issues dealt with during the four years, from the question of the use of Latin in mass, to the church's relation to non-Christians, to the use of the organ in liturgy and the proper clothing for nuns. This multitude of issues was enshrined in the council's sixteen official documents (three other council "constitutions," along with nine "decrees" and three "declarations"). It is fair to say, nonetheless, that *Gaudium et spes* constituted the drawing to a close of several of the council's defining themes, not least the question of the Catholic Church and its relation to the politics of human dignity.

Vatican II was convened by Pope John XXIII as the twenty-first ecumenical council. Like most of the councils since the split between the Eastern and Western Church in the eleventh century, Vatican II's official participants, the "council fathers," did not include representatives of the non–Roman Catholic Christian world—though many other religious leaders were invited to attend as distinguished observers. Like previous ecumenical councils, Pope John's reasons and timing for convening the twenty-first were multiple and divergent and were as much theological as circumstantial. The principal justifications he and his supporters gave for why a council was warranted included the need to deal (yet again) with the fact that since at least the nineteenth century the Catholic Church had been living in a world that sometimes gets glossed as post-Constantinian—a world in which the Catholic Church could no longer take for granted the institutionally privileged place it had held in the cultural and political order of Europe since late Antiquity. Official justifications also included the need to deal conclusively with the still formative effects of the Protestant Reformation and the sixteenth-century Council of Trent, a council that, though often described as a key to the “Counter-Reformation,” produced theological and political legacies many in the church (including Pope John) believed to be entirely too consistent with many of the Reformation's defining theological assumptions.

Above all, justifications for the council centered on the need (in John's and others' view) for the church to become forward looking in relation to the modern world. This problem too was multiple. It included the question of what to do with the ramifications of what O'Malley calls the church's "long nineteenth century"—that is, the place of the church in a world shaped by the cataclysmic effects (from the Church's point of view) of the French Revolution, the establish-
ment of new modes of secular and sovereign national powers, and the church’s previously negative reaction to modernity exemplified by the First Vatican Council’s assertion of papal infallibility (to say nothing of the lingering global effects of World War II, colonialism, postcolonialism, and the intensifying Cold War). The problem of the modern world also included the need to sort out what the church should say and do in relation to specific modern technological and industrial transformations: the stockpiling of nuclear weapons, the invention of birth control, and transformed views of natural history brought about by evolutionary biology. And the church needed to deal with its relation to, and participation in, the center-periphery effects of globalized capitalism and the asymmetries between the North Atlantic and the rest of the world with regard to issues of health, poverty, and development.

Bound up in all of these was the question of what to do about the church’s relationship to non-Christian individuals and institutions: its relation to the ecclesia ad extra—those “in addition to the called.” This included the church’s relation to other religious communities, most contentiously, in view of World War II, its relationship to Jewish communities. Somewhat less contentiously but no less pressingly, it also included the question of how the church should relate to modern nation-states, international corporations, civil society organizations, and, as reflected in Pope Paul VI’s address to the United Nations, institutions of international and multinational governance. The broadest framing of the ecclesia ad extra, however, was “humanity”: the problem of the church’s relation to humanity. This framing of the question of the church in the modern world elicited perhaps the most difficult and pernicious problem (outside of the question of internal church governance and authority, which was also on the agenda). The problem of the church and humanity, understood as the ecclesia ad extra, was central to the church’s salvational and pastoral imaginary: to what extent and in what ways should the church imagine itself as part of humanity, and to what extent and in what ways does it stand outside of, and beyond, humanity?

This question is one that many Catholic theologians (including Pope John’s immediate theological mentors) had framed using the classical Christian language of the relation between nature and grace, the natural and the supernatural, or, as it is sometimes put, the relation between the being of the world and the being of God: in what ways and to what extent do humans need the grace of God to achieve their highest good, understood as the fulfillment of their own nature? The question for John (and others)—a question that became one of the defining and bitterly disputed aspects of Vatican II—was how to understand the vocation of the church and its pastoral practices within this space of nature and grace. If the church’s pastoral
vocation included some kind of mediating role between what could be given by nature and what was needed of grace, one question was: could and should that mediating role be understood as extending to those outside the church? On one level the answer to that question would seem, for those involved, to be self-evidently “yes”—the church’s doors are open to everyone who is willing to pay the price. But the twist here was whether the church could play that mediating role in a fashion that did not turn primarily on an older discourse of repentance and return. Could the church establish a pastoral relationship to those who continue to stand outside the church in a manner predicated on something other than an insistence on the difference between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, or a call to nonbelievers to turn to the life of faith? For John and others the answer was, again, affirmative. In his opening address, which I examine below, John described the need for the church “to be the loving mother of all, benign, patient, full of mercy and goodness toward the children separated from her.” The answer was “yes,” in other words, because the church, along with those “in addition to the called,” formed part of a single human family, albeit a family in which the church is figured in the role of parent and caretaker.

Pope John framed all of this as the pastoral problem of the church in the modern world. He cast it as a matter of aggiornamento—of “updating” the church and its place in the modern world. Pope John’s critics, however, interpreted aggiornamento as code for “reform”—an interpretation that only served to reinforce their fear that Vatican II constituted an attempt to adapt the church to the modern world rather than offering a critical repudiation of it. Aggiornamento became a kind of slogan for the purpose of the council. As a result, the question of the relationship between the relative authority of the new and the old remained pressing throughout. Pope John’s and then Pope Paul’s efforts to update the church in its pastoral relation to the modern world was seen by many as tantamount to the innovation of doctrine. This meant that the problem of elaborating the church’s relation to the modern world, to quote from O’Malley’s elegant introduction to Vatican II, “went beyond, or might even seem to contravene, previous teachings: in a word, the problem of change in an institution that draws its lifeblood from a belief in the transcendent validity of the message it received from the past, which it is duty-bound to proclaim unadulterated.” Or, to put it differently, Pope John’s call for the church to consider a pastoral relationship to the modern world in noncondemnatory terms was seen by many as a move toward the secularization of the church, taking the term secular in its older sense of “ordinary time.” Updating the church’s relation to the modern world was interpreted by critics as a move to reform the church according to the needs of the modern world rather than the modern world according to the solutions of the church.
THE CHURCH, THE SECULAR, AND PASTORAL POWER

HUMANITY AND THE CHURCH: THE OUTLINES OF THE PASTORAL PROBLEM

Pope Paul VI’s 1965 address to the United Nations provides a sketch of the problem of the church and the modern world as it was framed at Vatican II and of the ways in which that problem ultimately induced significant shifts in the church’s ecclesial and pastoral imaginary, despite frequent claims that the council provided a more authentic relation to tradition.

The crux of Paul’s address, and its eventual significance for the politics of human dignity, concerns his characterization of the mission of the United Nations, which he describes as shared with and parallel to the mission of the Catholic Church. Paul proposed that the United Nations is a sort of reflection, in the temporal order, of the defining characteristic of the Catholic Church in the spiritual order. On one level there is nothing particularly novel about such a framing. A distinction between the secular and spiritual orders has been basic to the church’s style of discourse about politics and power since the fourth century. The difference between the church as the governor of souls and the empire, the city, the nation, or the state as the governor of worldly affairs was not new. What was new—or at least distinctive—were the transitions in the political situation of the modern world, which characterized nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe as well as much of the colonial and postcolonial world. These transitions gave a distinctive cast to Paul’s otherwise classical distinction. First, the difference between the secular and religious, for much of the modern world, was no longer a distinction of modes of temporality internal to the life of faith. It was not a distinction between the ordinary historical time of this world (and the material needs of that world, including the exercise of political powers) and the religious time of the church (insofar as the church was understood to be the mediator and representative of timeless and eternal truths within history). The church’s theology was anchored in the double notion of Jesus Christ as the eternal become incarnate in history and the church as the guardian and representative of that divine incarnation in an ongoing fashion throughout history. The church, in other words, understood itself to be the embodiment of the realization of a conjuncture between secular and religious temporalities and secular and religious modes of being. Broadly speaking, with the rise of the modern nation-state and the partial displacement of the church from the direct exercise of political power in Europe, the relation between the religious and the secular became one in which, institutionally and socially, the former became one domain within the latter rather than the other way round. There was a sort of inversion of the inside and the outside in the order of powers. In describing the United Nations’ mission as parallel to the mission of the church in the secular order, Paul evokes an older
political imaginary but places it within a frame of reference in which the secular has become dominant.

The second thing that is different about Paul’s distinction between the United Nations and the church as two orders of care in the world is that Paul is actually bringing the United Nations’ mission—in its secular mission—much closer to the church’s own mission than the older language of religious and secular orders usually implied. The older language implied distinctive spheres of activities and even different, if complementary, ends—the ordering of worldly affairs on the one side and the care of the soul on the other. In Paul’s address, however, the United Nations is called—and is described as being uniquely equipped—to help the church in its mission to actualize “fraternal unity” among all people. For much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Catholic theologians had striven to diagnose and address critically the perceived social fragmentations that accompanied the development of modern forms of sociality in Europe and other parts of the world. This is most conspicuously captured in critiques of political liberalism and the idea of the individual as the founding element of social and political existence. Liberalism and individualism, effected through both political and economic developments, was held to cut against an older Catholic view of participatory sociality in which individual life is predicated on social forms and not the other way round. Against modern fragmentations, Catholic theologians identified the problems of unity and unification as major elements of the church’s critique of, and response to, modernity. This was sometimes—as it was in Paul’s address—framed in terms of the need to unify humanity. Humanity is figured both as the premise and object of the church’s work in the world: humanity as a unity already given in the singular fact of God as the creator of the world. But humanity is also figured as in need of full actualization: humanity is not only a premise and object of the church’s work in the world, but the actualization of humanity is the church’s objective and obligation. Paul describes the United Nations as a pastoral partner in this work: in view of humanity’s essential unity, it is the obligation of the United Nations, like the church, to make what is primordially given actual and to do this by overcoming those factors in the world that continue to produce disunity.

Humanity, in its essence and need for actualization, is a common object of responsibility for the church and for the United Nations. As such, humanity is a common missional anchor point for the activities of both. Humanity, in Paul’s address, is figured as obliging care and responsibility for both the church and the United Nations. In its intrinsic but not yet actual being, humanity calls both the United Nations and the church to account. The ontology of humanity is, one might say, “nomic” in that it exists like a law that obliges response and care. The church and the United Nations are both responsible to humanity but also for humanity.
According to Paul, humanity’s nomic mode of being is one side of a shared mission. The other side is closely connected. It consists in the fact that the United Nations and the church together are part of, even as they are exceeded by, humanity. On the surface this may sound self-evident. But theologically it is not at all obvious that Paul would assert such a thing about the nature of the church. It is not obvious for two reasons. The first reason is that it can be interpreted as reflecting a view of the church’s relation to the world characterized by what Charles Taylor has referred to as a nonmediated view of social reality. Taylor understands such a view to be one of the defining features of a modern social imaginary, one of the diacritics that cuts across, links, and distinguishes modernity in its multiplicity. This view of sociality can be set against what might be called a hierarchical imaginary, in which one’s identity is bound up in various ordered collectives and in which their hierarchical relations become the media of one’s relationship to power. In such a hierarchical view, the church has often figured itself as a kind of crown of an ordered cosmos, insofar as the church understands itself to be pastorally responsible for that cosmos and insofar as the church understands itself to be uniquely called and positioned to serve as the mediator of God’s grace for and in that cosmos. The question of hierarchy, the distribution of authority, and the ratios of power and service for the pastoral vocation of church leaders were all in play at Vatican II insofar as they pertained to the church’s internal governance. Paul’s emphasis on the fact of the church’s internal relationship to humanity, and the parallel mission it shares with the United Nations in being called to help actualize humanity’s intrinsic unity as a participating aspect of that potential unity, highlighted questions of hierarchy, power, and pastoral service with regard to the church’s external relations.

The figure of the church as part of humanity and not only external to or above it is reflected in Paul’s characterization of a two-part concern of the council fathers. The council fathers, he suggested, are thinking about the church and its own affairs and so are addressing themselves to the church in its internal relations. They are also, however, thinking about how the church can address itself rightly and effectively “to the entire world.” The church needs to address humanity as an “expert on humanity.” The church is an expert on humanity not only because it understands itself to be the guardian of eternal truths about the human condition. It is also an expert on humanity because it is part of humanity and can therefore speak in the voice of humanity as humanity’s representative. It speaks to and for humanity. Paul attributes this ontological doubling—this mode of existence by way of which the church is capable of speaking both to humanity and as humanity—to the United Nations. The church and the United Nations are both immanent to humanity, even as they can take responsibility for its actualization. The church and the United Nations both provide a kind of reflexive pastoral care. They are responsible for
and to that of which they constitute a part: to humanity, for humanity, as humanity. Retrospectively, it is fair to say that at Vatican II the supposition, articulation, and disagreement over the terms of this series—the church to, for, and as humanity—constituted a fundamental reproblemization of the church, those outside the church, and the possibility of a relation of pastoral care between the two. The factor that held these elements together and offered one possible solution to this reproblemization—and this is the factor that bound the United Nations and the church into a shared pastoral mission—is, as I’ll explain, human dignity.

It bears noting that Pope Paul’s address did not elaborate any of this in theological or anthropological detail. The shared mission of the church and the United Nations in caring for humanity’s unity, in the name of a shared responsibility for human dignity, was simply declared—as if it could simply be taken for granted. It bears noting because this declarative mode was not only rhetorically strategic—which to some extent it no doubt was. It bears noting because it represents one outcome of several years of intense theological negotiations and struggle among the council fathers concerning four interconnected questions. (1) What is humanity such that the church should think of itself as responsible for and to it? (2) What is the church such that it should think of itself as responsible to and for humanity as an object of care? (3) Can the relation between the church and humanity be formulated in such a way as to provide a basis for clearly discerning as well as organizing appropriate pastoral interventions? (4) And can these pastoral interventions—this pastoral obligation—be formulated, explained, and justified in such a way that the relation between the church and humanity can be accepted and understood by both the ecclesia interna as well as the ecclesia ad extra? These interconnected questions—humanity, church, pastoral relation, and mode of formulation—were consolidated and responded to at the Second Vatican Council. A critical element in drawing these questions together and in formulating a response to them was the notion of human dignity. Said another way, human dignity, formulated in quite precise terms, was put forward as an answer to the pastoral problem of the church and its relation to humanity.

THE WORLD OF TODAY

I proposed in the introduction that the concept of human dignity as an institutional object of care only began to coalesce and take on a kind of singular, coherent, and operable status within and through a series of specific twentieth-century venues and events. I proposed that this coalescence, this status, and these venues and events were pastoral in character—albeit in a contemporary and restylized form. This fact—the fact of the pastoral restylization and its connection to the emerging coher-
ence of the politics of intrinsic worth—seems to me to be crucial to understanding the forms and functions of the notion of human dignity today. It is for this reason that I think it is important to begin my inquiry into the contemporary politics of human dignity with the Second Vatican Council, despite the fact that Vatican II is chronologically preceded by the second of my three cases, that is, the formulation of the concept of human dignity within the United Nations through the early work of the Commission on Human Rights. At Vatican II, the bishops and theological experts took up in an explicit and sustained manner a series of key difficulties and questions connected to human dignity crucial to understanding all three cases. Another way of saying this is that the pastoral problem of human dignity, which preceded the Second Vatican Council, is nonetheless most clearly articulated at the Second Vatican Council.

One of the principal difficulties concerning human dignity at Vatican II, which became a vector of controversy, is whether or not—or the extent to which—the turn to human dignity as an object of pastoral care constitutes a sharp break with prior modes of ethical and political reasoning. In the case of Vatican II this question of continuity and discontinuity was taken up with regard to the question of doctrinal precedent. The term human dignity is clearly part of a longer tradition of theological and philosophical reasoning within the church. But at Vatican II and (in a legal rather than doctrinal register at the United Nations) the question of precedent, and the relative authority of precedent, became a significant one. To put it in other terms: the American philosopher Richard McKeon frequently reminded his students that when studying intellectual history it is vital to keep in mind that a term is composed of a word plus a concept plus a referent. Over time, words stay the same; concepts and referents change. The question for the council fathers at Vatican II was whether the term human dignity as it was being used to think about the church’s pastoral relation to the modern world brought with it new concepts and new referents.

Despite talk of aggiornamento, of renewing the church, it was vital to the council fathers that they be seen as conducting themselves in continuity with previous ways of thinking, acting, and relating—even if their deliberations were being carried out in the name of the church’s relation to the “mundo huius temporis,” a phrase that literally means “the world at this time” but that was often translated during the council as “modern times” or “the modern world.” In his opening address, for example, Pope John encouraged the council fathers to proceed in “perfect conformity to authentic doctrine” while also encouraging them to keep in mind the need to articulate doctrine in a manner consonant with “the methods of research” and “the literary forms of modern thought.”

The difference between the literal and interpretive translations of “mundo huius
"temporis" is worth thinking about in light of the challenge the council fathers faced in maintaining a sense of continuity with tradition even while taking seriously non-traditional methods of research and expression. In the more biting and polemical moments of dispute, the critics of Pope John’s vision for the aggiornamento of the church held that the council fathers were allowing forms of modern thought to determine (and even dominate) the substance of doctrine. The modern, as figured in these criticisms, was cast as an attitude that valorizes the new over the old. Against John’s call for renewal, these critics appealed to an ideal of tradition. They did this in a fashion that, one could argue, merely inverted the terms of their critique of the modern. They expressed and advocated an ecclesial and conciliar attitude that valorized the old over the new: theological responses to the modern world could be considered legitimate only insofar as they could pass the test of being judged against the standards of tradition. It is fair to say that everyone involved, even those who were in favor of using the council as a venue for innovation, knew to speak their theological truths in the name of tradition. The vital political question was a familiar one: whose interpretation of tradition and traditional veridictional modes would ultimately govern the council’s proceedings and legacy?

Despite the rhetorical weight of tradition, it is nonetheless also fair to say that the deliberations at Vatican II were, in fact, neither modern nor traditional. They were—to use a technical term—contemporary. The problem of human dignity as they approached it is, in a strict sense, a contemporary problem. If the modern is thought of as an attitude that valorizes the new over the old and tradition an attitude that valorizes the old over the new, the contemporary names an attitude in which elements of past configurations are reconfigured with new elements in such a way that the resulting form and its significance are neither reducible to those past configurations nor the new elements but to the stylized relation between them. A contemporary attitude indexes significance neither to continuity or discontinuity with the new or the old. It indexes its significance, rather, to the production of forms of discourse and practice that are taken to be adequate to dealing with situations of breakdown, uncertainty, or discord.

At Vatican II, the contests and struggles over the relation of the church and the modern world, and the characterization of humanity and human dignity as part of that relation, was enacted and narrated as though these characterizations were traditional. Even the supporters of aggiornamento insisted that their efforts to speak to the needs of the modern world were, in fact, anchored in the church’s doctrinal legacy in a fashion that was not only fundamentally consistent with that legacy but more consistent with that legacy than the positions of their detractors. The question and struggle for the council fathers turned on which version of tradition would, in the end, be made to count as authoritative. However, when closely
examined, it is clear that the substance of these struggles—for the critics as well as the supporters of aggiornamento—can more adequately be described as contemporary. The task was to reconfigure traditional theological concepts and arguments in a fashion that made them adequate to the pastoral challenge that Pope John placed before the council. Despite talk of tradition and continuity, what the fathers said and did had the effect of introducing important transformations into prior formulations, sensibilities, and modes of action—without abandoning those prior formulations, sensibilities, and modes of action. The ramifications of these transformations for the politics of intrinsic worth connected to the figure of human dignity are still being contended with today, theologically, politically, institutionally, and pastorally.

MOTHER CHURCH AND THE MODERN WORLD

The notion of universal humanity and the relation of the church to universal humanity has been a major theme of Christian life from the first century c.e., appearing in Christian doctrine, practice, scripture, and theology. This theme, and the question of the ecclesial practices connected to it, was reconfigured in the council’s struggles over the question of the church in the modern world. From the outset—and to considerable consternation on the part of many of the council’s more wary participants—the question of universal humanity and the church was put forward as a pastoral problem, and, as a pastoral problem, it was ultimately shaped by the related question of how the church ought to account for (think about and adjust itself to) the exigencies and conditions of the modern world.8

The problem of church and humanity thus entailed a reassessment of the church’s pastoral rationality. The root of the term rationality is the Latin ratio. The term ratio refers to a system of relationships that serve to establish the metrics or standards according to which comparisons and judgments can be made among multiple variables, comparisons and judgments that allow for those variables and their relationships subsequently to be adjusted. In this way, the ratio calibrates the logic on the basis of which particular relations can be constituted and ordered in an ongoing fashion. The problem of the church and humanity, as a pastoral problem, required participants in Vatican II to revisit the logic on the basis of which the church might constitute and order its relationship to the modern world as well as the regime of practices and roles consistent with that logic.

In a connected fashion, it might be said that the problem of the church and the modern world likewise required the council fathers to rethink the church’s pastoral techniques (tekhnē) and equipment (paraskeuē)—to introduce two other classical designations. In the domain of pastoral practice and directed spiritual care, tekhnē
can be thought of as referring to those studied arts that inform and are expressed through a practice in such a way that the practitioner can successfully conduct the spiritual life. A technique both calibrates and embodies a mode of practice. Tekhnē is, in this sense, a modal term connected to the practice of an art. The art of pastoral and spiritual care in the Christian church, and especially in the Christian monasteries, borrowed from the tekhnē tou biou, the “arts of living,” first formulated and exercised within the Greek and Roman philosophical schools. Similarly, in this context, paraskeuē (literally “preparation”), equipment can be thought of as the forms of practice by way of which one spiritually prepares oneself for life in an uncertain world. Classically it was understood that in the conduct of the spiritual life one needs equipment, which can then be exercised as part of the arts of spiritual practice. In this way one can move toward the ability to free oneself from prior habits and dispositions and constitute, in one’s very being, new habits and dispositions understood as new capabilities: equipment was exercised as part of the struggle one undertook to become the subject one believed one needed to be. If the question of humanity and the church was to be considered as a reconsideration of the logic of a pastoral relation with the modern world, the church would need to rethink techniques and equipment, modes and forms of practice, adequate to such a pastoral art carried out as part of that relationship. It is fair to say that at Vatican II the council fathers were confronted with the problem of how to constitute a contemporary logic, technique, and equipment for a pastoral relation between the church and the modern world. The pastoral problem of the church and the modern world defined a significant part of the council agenda from the opening session, and the elements of that problem can be usefully summarized through a reading of Pope John’s opening address to the council participants. A more thorough investigation of the complexities of the problem and how those complexities were managed by the council fathers would require a sustained investigation of the multiple interconnected issues raised during the four years of the council, as well as of the strategic constitution (and tactical reconstitution) of the various subcommittees that dealt directly with those issues, and, perhaps most importantly, a careful review of the development of the schema (the background papers, which served to structure and guide the production of the council’s final documents) prepared in advance for the council—especially those schema that dealt directly with the church’s relation to non-Christian religious traditions, nation-states and other political institutions, and to the other specified instances of the ecclesia ad extra. Keeping this in mind, one can nonetheless see retrospectively how John’s opening address gave articulation not only to his aspirations for the council but to the conceptual and pragmatic elements that would continue to occupy the council fathers, even after John’s untimely death at the end
of the council’s first year, and how these elements would be assembled such that the concept of human dignity might be put forward as a privileged answer to the church’s pastoral problem.  

On October 11, 1962, more than three thousand official participants, including nearly 2,500 bishops in their formal robes and miters, processed through a crowd of tens of thousands in St. Peter’s Square into the basilica to open Vatican II. Following the mass, Pope John offered what, for many outside observers, seemed a rhetorically simple and theologically understated exordium. However unadorned and declarative, his address subsequently became a touchstone both for the council’s supporters and its critics. In addition to laying out many of the defining themes, Pope John brought to articulation what would amount to the council’s unofficial (though forcefully, if tacitly, maintained) disposition toward the modern world. This disposition would prove as crucial for delimiting the council’s approach to the pastoral problem as any of the more theologically explicit aspects of his address. The disposition toward the modern world is captured in the title of John’s address: *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*—“Mother Church rejoices”—named (in official church fashion) after his address’s first line. Although the joy expressed in the title actually refers to the fact of the opening of the council per se, which John had been working to convene for several years, it also captures John’s sense that the church and the modern world found themselves in an auspicious moment, a moment in which—for all of modernity’s other shortcomings—John saw the possibility for new, mutually enriching forms of pastoral care, care that the council might bring into being.  

John began his address in an unassuming fashion: “In calling this vast assembly of bishops,” he intended “to assert once again the magisterium, which is unfailing and endures until the end of time.” The line is unassuming in that it is the kind of rationale that might be put forward for any type of ecumenical council. If unassuming, however, John nonetheless immediately signals a first significant feature of the mode of pastoral relation he envisions, namely, that it will be a mode of practices predicated on the church’s magisterium, that is, the authority vested in the pope and the bishops to determine what counts as the church’s authentic teaching. The pastoral relation that John envisions with the modern world is first of all a teaching relation, a relation constituted by the church in its capacity as a teaching authority. John articulates what his fellow council fathers would have already taken for granted: the idea that the church’s teaching authority is defined by a kind of historical permanence—that although the magisterium may be given multiple forms in and across history, its substance endures in an unchanging fashion across history. John reminds his listeners of the fact that the magisterium has a two-sided temporality. On the one side, the pope and the bishops are endowed with the task of, and ability to, safeguard truths that are unchanging and even eternal. On the other side,
in exercising their teaching authority they speak to and must account for a historically determined and situationally defined world, a world whose specific contours require constant assessment and reassessment: how does the world exist in this place and this moment? What is the world of today? Or, as the council fathers would put it, using a biblical designation, how should the church read the “signs of the time”? On one side, the magisterium draws on and safeguards eternal truths for history, and, on the other side, it takes account of history in the articulation of those truths. The double temporality of the magisterium is vital to the church’s pastoral relation to the modern world, and it is the first element of the pastoral problem of the church and the modern world John calls to mind. The church’s teaching authority and its double temporality has traditionally been oriented toward those within the church, or perhaps to those who have deviated from the church—taking account of historical deviation in a bid to cultivate an eternally informed order. John’s opening lines signal what he will later make explicit: in his view, the magisterium is also pastorally central to the church’s relation to the contemporary world.

John immediately signals a second significant feature of the pastoral problem, which can be thought of as the other side of the first. John explains that in convening the council he is calling the enduring magisterium to take account of “the errors, the requirements, and the opportunities of our time.” If the church is to have a pastoral relation with those beyond the church, it is a relation that must be appropriate to the world of today. The term “our time” holds together a series: errors, requirements, opportunities. Nothing in this series would have seemed remarkable to those in attendance, and not one was unique to the Second Vatican Council. Councils have always been justified as responses to historically specific errors and opportunities. But this fact of timeliness is no less significant for being typical. Its significance lies in two conditions. The first is that contemporary problems—taken again in the technical sense of the term—involves a certain temporality without thereby suggesting history. The contemporary is a moving ratio of the recent past and the near future. John’s address is calling the church to a contemporary problem, which is, by definition, singular in certain respects. Apart from this singularity a council would not be needed, after all. The second condition of significance is that the contemporary world is not being addressed simply as a site of doctrinal controversy. In the case of doctrinal dispute, the task of the church is to reassert the “unfailing and enduring” authority of the magisterium against history. In this way, the contemporary world as a site of deviation or failure can be rectified and its deviations overcome. But something else is going on here. The magisterium is being called to pastoral account. It is being called to care for the contemporary world beyond the condemnation of its errors. In this light, the character of the contemporary world becomes much more problematic. Caring for the contemporary as a
noncondemnatory form of the pastorate is something quite distinctive: it raises the question of a possible mutual adjustment between the historically enduring and the historically specific, an adjustment that risks unsettling the ostensible timelessness of the magisterium.

The contemporary world, John says, should be taken account of so that the church’s teachings “might be presented in exceptional form to all men throughout the world.” Here is a third significant feature of John’s address: he calls the bishops to exercise their teaching authority in relation to a particular audience: the *ecclesia ad extra*. (I will come back to this idea of an “exceptional form.”) By calling the council fathers to address themselves to “all men throughout the world,” John signals that they will not only be responsible to and for the souls of the faithful. Nor is he calling them together to address those outside the church as lost sheep in need of returning to the fold—a century before, the First Vatican Council had responded to the problems of modernity precisely by telling the world to return to the authority of the church. The call to repentance is not the reason why John has convened the council. Rather, John convened the council so that the bishops as the keepers of the church’s magisterium could exercise their authority in a fashion that treats the world as that which is simultaneously internal and external to the church.

John recognizes that this task means presenting the church’s teachings in an “exceptional form”; this task requires the invention of new forms. The bishops must find ways to give the magisterium form suited to the task of addressing “all men of the world.” If the bishops are to give form to a pastoral relation with the *ecclesia ad extra* by way of the church’s magisterium, then the magisterium will need to be presented in and through a form appropriate to “all men of the world.” A challenge was laid before the council fathers: to find a way of speaking the truth—a veridical mode—that is appropriate to (coherent with, operable within, and taken to be plausible by) the world of today. What this means is that even before the work of the council began, a crucial question had been put on the table, a question whose answer would deeply shape the legacy and politics of the post–Vatican II church. The question is this: is an ecumenical council the kind of venue that can give exceptional form to the church’s teachings and speak the truth in a way that can be taken seriously by those who do not convert to the church, that is, by the *ecclesia ad extra*? Can the enduring and timeless teachings of the church be given a form that can be taken seriously by those who do not otherwise share the church’s faith? John’s critics would add: and does a council betray itself by even attempting to take up such a demand? Is a council the appropriate venue through which to mold the church’s teaching authority to the needs and care of the contemporary world? Ecumenical councils had traditionally been a venue of ecclesial governance through which ostensibly timeless questions of dogma were taken up and only applied in judgment
to historical questions, limitations, and deviations, and then later to the pastoral
question of how best to act in view of such judgment. Should a council articulate
the church’s teaching authority in terms and modes that will be taken seriously by
the world of today? This question would become a major blockage point for many
of the council fathers and for many of those in the Catholic Church observing the
proceedings. The appeal to human dignity would ultimately form part of a strategy
for moving past such blockages. But this is to jump ahead. The point here is that the
demand John is placing upon the council fathers involves converting the church’s
magisterium into a mode of truth speaking that will be suitable to establishing a
pastoral relation with an object of care that is not in the first place lost sheep, or
fallen souls, or those in theological error. Rather, the object of the pastoral relation
is, in the first place, “all men” of a world of today, with its errors, requirements,
limitations, and opportunities.

A key analytic question is this: how does Pope John position and justify his
pastoral expectation? He proposes that the church should be future oriented and
that it should face the future without fear and with optimism. The significance of
this posture of optimism about the future of the modern world and the church’s
relation to it needs to be read against the church’s “long nineteenth century,” that
is to say, against its relative displacement, beginning with the French Revolution,
from the center of political affairs in Europe and elsewhere. During much of the
nineteenth century, the Vatican responded to the institutionalization of a secular
political imagination, through, alternatively, a repudiation of modernity and an in-
tensification of claims to infallibility. John specifically positions himself against
the mood and style of Vatican I, in which the modern world was figured in primarily
negative terms: “we must disagree with those prophets of gloom.” This posture, as I
have already noted, proves to be crucial. A pastoral relation calibrated to the care of
a world whose future is taken to be favorable and whose faults are taken to be mat-
ters of limitation and incompletion requires different modes and forms of pastoral
activity than those indexed to a world whose future is taken to be dire, perverse, or
apostate. John’s optimism about the future, it bears underscoring, is not simply a
variant of progressivism or an alternative philosophy of history. Indeed, he explicitly
sets himself against progressivism of a secular sort, which he casts as unguided and
incapable of orientation to humanity’s highest goods. The future of the modern
world is bright not because it is destined to unfold in an ameliorative fashion. It is
bright because of what John sees as the possibility that humans in the modern world
will learn to actualize a set of defining and intrinsic capacities: namely, human-
ity will actualize its essential unity, and therein its essential dignity, insofar as it is
guided by the church. John voices optimism about the church’s ability to facilitate
humanity’s actualization within, and partially as a result of, the modern world.
John projects two favorable outcomes of the council's optimistic approach to the future. The first is favorable for the church itself. By “bringing herself up to date,” the church will gain in “spiritual riches.” The church will gain in spiritual riches because it will become more capable of fulfilling the sort of pastoral vocation that John has indicated. The modern world as a pastoral opportunity is an occasion for the church's spiritual enrichment. The other outcome favors the ecclesia ad extra. If the council fathers direct the church's teaching authority toward the needs and opportunities of the world, “men, families, and peoples” will be oriented to those spiritual things (activities, relations, aspirations) in relation to which they can ultimately be made “humanly complete.” A startling diagnostic begins to take shape at this point in John's address: the claim that the council should face the future with optimism is warranted in part by the character of the modern human condition. The modern human condition is a point of conjunction in the relation between the church and the world. The modern world, John says, has demonstrated “humankind's ingenuity.” The twist and the tragedy is that modern ingenuity is not oriented toward the fulfillment of humanity's highest good—its summum bonum. John invokes and reconstructs St. Augustine's classic response to the “cities of the world.” The cities of the world, in Augustine's estimation, were good—even marked by God's grace insofar as humans remain capable of cultivating their own goods. But those goods, on Augustine's view, are ultimately incomplete unless and until they were oriented toward humanity's highest good, namely, participation in what Augustine calls the order of the spirit. With these Augustinian echoes, John insists that the modern world, marvelous in its human achievement, requires proper orientation—proper reorientation. The church as an expert on humanity's highest good is capable of providing that reorientation.

Here John gives things what might be called a Thomistic twist. Thomas Aquinas, following Aristotle, proposed that humanity's highest good, which he took to be contemplation of God, is intrinsic to its nature as a rational being, even if the fulfillment of that highest good (that is, God) is not intrinsic. If humanity in the modern world needs orientation to its highest good, that highest good is nonetheless proper to its own being. This means that the church's capacity for the pastoral orientation of the world is actually a matter of the church pointing out to humanity its own proper, that is, intrinsic ends. The pastoral orientation is fitted to the nature of human nature: the human, like the church, is a being whose most significant capacities are proper to it. The actualization of those capacities—the actualization of the anthropological summum bonum—requires a working out of what is, in fact, always already humanly available. John signals that the pastoral problem of the church and the modern world coincides with the longstanding theological question of nature and grace: how do things natural participate in and become defined by
things supernatural? Are the goods implied in the participation of the natural and supernatural (that is, in the human participation in the being of God) immanent to nature and hence require the church’s cultivation and assistance, or do they, because of human evil and fallenness, ultimately lie beyond human nature per se and hence require the church to serve as a spiritual bridge between the being of the world and the being of God? What does the church need to be in order for the human to attain to its highest good? And, however these questions are answered, how might the church’s teaching authority need to be reimagined if it is to become the source of a pastoral relation? On John’s view, the teaching authority needs to be reimagined as the means by which each human and all of humanity actualize a naturally inherent capacity for the supernatural. Optimism about the future of the modern world and the church’s pastoral capacities turns on a vision for humanity in which its highest good constitutes a realization of itself. This is the first and most basic supposition of John’s vision for pastoral power and the church’s aggiornamento.

A second and equally important supposition of John’s vision for the church’s pastoral relation to the modern world has already been suggested. John presumed a certain ontological and temporal adequacy between the church, especially in its teaching authority, and humans as objects of pastoral care. John’s presumption of an ontological and temporal adequacy is classic and basically Thomistic, and it touched on a source of considerable Roman Catholic theological dispute concerning modernity that had existed for more than a century before Vatican II.

First the ontology: John speaks about things human in a manner that reflects his sense that humans are naturally oriented to the supernatural. John’s optimistic reading of things human in the modern world suggests, tacitly, that human nature cannot be adequately accounted for without reference to the supernatural. As a “whole man” composed of body and soul, he says, the human “tends toward heaven.” In this affirmation, John follows the lead of the so-called integralist theologians: in humans one finds an integral relation between the natural and supernatural. The so-called integralist dispute, the dispute over the relation of nature and the supernatural, or nature and grace, shadowed all of the proceedings at Vatican II and particularly the work on human nature and human dignity. The dispute, which John and his theological mentors argued went back to the Middle Ages, centered on the question of whether human sinfulness and disobedience to God totally separates humans from God in their very being: does human sinfulness produce a radical ontological break between the divine and the human, the supernatural and the natural? Much of Reformation and Counter-Reformation theology presumed that it in fact did and proposed that such a break was the ontological predicate of the gratuity of God’s salvation of humans in Christ: salvation can be thought of as entirely a free work of God on behalf of humanity precisely because humans after
“the fall” were no longer in a place, ontologically speaking, to participate in bringing about their own highest good, that is, their salvation, through the cultivation of their own Godlike potentials. The integralist theologians set themselves against both the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation. They argued that the church did not need to presume such an absolute ontological break in the relation between nature and the supernatural in order to affirm and assure the “pure gratuity” of salvation. They argued that the presumption of a fully secular domain of “pure nature” (that is, a domain devoid of participation in the divine life resulting from human sin) as a warrant and guarantee of “pure gratuity” introduces a fundamental departure from classical thought. They argued, moreover, that the presumption of “pure nature” had facilitated the generation of many of the ills of the modern world precisely because it (in their view) allowed for the corollary presumption that the being of the world was characterized primarily by games of power and not by participation in the life of God. I will say more about this dispute and its conceptual and practical ramifications for thinking about human dignity in the next chapter. Here it is enough to signal that by effectively (and by no means naïvely) taking up an integralist ontology as predicate of the pastoral relation, John's address established a very specific set of parameters within which a pastoral relation between the church and humanity might be imagined and worked out. In short: the notion that the human by nature tends to the supernatural calls for a different pastoral use of the church's teaching authority than an anthropology predicated on the notion of complete depravity. In the former the church needs to care for and tend to what is properly human. In the latter the church needs to function as an exclusive mediator of an otherwise inaccessible supernatural grace.

John's optimism about the future did not only turn on a Thomistic reading of human nature, however. It also turned on his sense of “the present order of things.” If part of the rationale for the council is to bring the church into a new pastoral relation to the world, the question can rightly be asked: why now? What is it about the “present order of things” that makes such a council appropriate? John proposes that a new order of human relations is near at hand, an order that calls for a shift in the church’s pastoral relation to the world. This new order will be produced by what he refers to as the concert of Divine Providence and human effort. The role of the church is to provide orientation in this concerted effort. Humanity by nature tends to the supernatural; humanity oriented by the church and facilitated by Divine Providence will attain to the supernatural.

But again the hanging question was: why now? What is it about the modern world that makes such a fulfillment a possibility? Multiple answers are suggested in John’s address—but only suggested. For example, John refers to current positive relations of ecclesial and nonecclesial powers and a current human disposition to the
idea of a unified humanity. But John does not really provide a clear and satisfactory answer. The assertion of such an auspicious present order of things, however, turns out to be generative despite (or perhaps because of) his lack of a clear answer. It introduces an interpretive task for the council fathers: a need to understand the world of today in such a fashion that the church’s relation to it can help facilitate the actualization of humanity’s intrinsic potentials. This task was given form as a question: what are “the signs of the times,” and how might they be read as pastorally auspicious? As I will discuss in the next chapter, Gaudium et spes, the Pastoral Constitution, is formulated precisely as an answer to this question. Needless to say, not everyone was satisfied either with the question or the answer. In any case, John asserts the auspicious character of the modern world and links it with the ontological question of the relation of nature and the supernatural.

The ontological axis nature/supernatural implies and involves a temporal axis: historical/eternal. Like the first, the second axis, in various forms, has been the subject of theological debate for millennia. And again, like the first, the pastoral demand put to the council gives the temporality of the relation of the natural and the supernatural—framed as the relation of the historical and the eternal—distinctive form and significance. If, ontologically, the human is by nature oriented to the supernatural, what is the temporal mode of this ontology? Is the fulfillment of the natural in the supernatural a question of this-worldly or other-worldly salvation (to use Max Weber’s distinction)? The answer is precisely that the distinction between this-world and other-world needs to be problematized. Temporally, the human is historical but oriented in history to eternity. But what does this mean conceptually and pastorally? How do the historical and the eternal intersect if not orthogonally? What does it mean that the human is a continuum or even coincidence between the historical and the eternal? What is the human such that it finds its actuality in eternity and such that the temporal mode of eternity plays a defining role for the historical? John’s address states about the human that “since he [sic] is a pilgrim on this earth, [his nature] commands him to tend always toward heaven.” The question is: what does this mean for the church’s pastoral relation to humanity? What is the church such that it might be capable of offering care to humanity marked by this temporality? These questions will be taken up in terms of the church’s own double temporality. Like the church, the defining features of humanity are both within and beyond history. As I will explain in the next chapter, this doubling—the temporality and ontology of humanity and the temporality and ontology of the church—coincides at human dignity.

So, John’s optimism about the modern world is carried by the presumption of an ontological and temporal adequacy between things human and things ecclesial.
A further question follows: what is the mode according to which this pastoral relation can be established and made to operate? John’s answer is: the effective teaching of Christian doctrine in light of contemporary needs and conditions. Much has been made of the fact that John called the council to a pastoral and not only a doctrinal set of tasks. The council’s written constitutions (the documentary legacy of the council’s work) are, in fact, distinguished according to their status as either doctrinal or pastoral. Emphasis on the strict distinction between the pastoral and the doctrinal, however, obscures the integral relation of teaching and care in the pastoral mode to which John calls the church. The pastoral relation that John emphasizes and to which he calls the church is a teaching relation. The mode of the pastoral relation is not the shepherding of the flock or the conduct of souls. Rather, it is a matter of guarding the “sacred deposit of Christian doctrine” and fashioning it in such a way that it can become the basis of a pastoral relation between the church and the world. Three things must be mutually adjusted: the church, humanity, and teaching as a mode of pastoral practice. John’s challenge to the council is to give form to this mode and to give form by way of the magisterium.

The problem that John presents is thus not a matter of discriminating between doctrinal and pastoral concerns and of constituting a relation between the two in which the latter is the application of the former. Rather, the problem is precisely a matter of converting “authority in truth,” that is, converting the authority of the magisterium from an instrument of doctrine within the church to a mode and form of pastoral care for what is beyond the church, the ecclesia ad extra. It is worth quoting John at length here. His phrasing throws into relief the problem of linking the pastoral and the doctrinal:

Our duty is not only to guard this precious treasure, as if we were concerned only with its antiquity. . . . The salient point of this Council is not, therefore, a discussion of one article or another of the fundamental doctrine of the Church . . . [but] a step forward toward a doctrinal penetration and formation of consciousness . . . through the methods of research and through the literary forms of modern thought. The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another. And it is the latter that must be taken into great consideration with patience if necessary, everything being measured in the forms and proportions of a magisterium which is predominantly pastoral in character.

What kind of practice could this consist in—the church’s teaching authority caring for the human in the modern world? John’s answer is that the church must show humans how mortal life is to be properly ordered. Crucially, John’s emphasis is not
placed on the conduct of that ordering, per se. The church's pastoral relation to the world does not consist in ordering, but in the demonstration or indication of right order. Given the status of humanity, as that creature who lives on an axis of nature and the supernatural, this proper ordering consists in indicating how to fulfill “our duties as citizens of earth and of heaven.” Such ordering, John says, entails tending ceaselessly to the attainment of eternal happiness, and doing so by coordinating earthly goods to that end. John stresses that in this ceaseless attainment the church needs to be “useful to society today.” This usefulness consists in the church helping guide humanity in the pursuit of its proper ends. John's critics took this call to usefulness to be an inversion of authority: why should the church need to prove itself useful to a secular world? The answer, articulated by Paul in his address to the United Nations, is that the church needs to be useful because it is internal and not merely external to humanity, internal and not merely external to history. If the call is for the church to be useful, in other words, this is not a call for a departure from its own nature—a reduction to mere “utility.” At the level of proper order, the capacities of the church and the world may not overlap entirely, but their purpose and goal is shared.

John's presumption of an ontological and temporal adequacy of the church in its pastoral relation to humanity raises the question of practice in relation to truth. How is the church's teaching authority to be put to work as pastoral equipment? How can doctrinal authority be given form as a mode of pastoral care between the church and the world? The church’s usefulness to society insofar as doctrine “influences the numerous fields of human activity” requires that the church, while not departing from “the sacred patrimony of truth . . . must ever look to the present, to the new conditions and forms of life.” John’s wording presumes the possibility of preserving eternal substance in new forms, a presumption that was not at all obvious to his detractors. In this, John again introduces a dilemma that will remain unresolved throughout the council’s proceedings: according to what rationality, calculation, or type of thought can the pastorate guide humanity to its proper ends within the framework of the teaching authority of the church?

Prior councils have converted doctrine to power through condemnation, judgment, and even persecution. Although acknowledging the failings of the modern world (“fallacious teachings,” “dangerous concepts”), John explicitly rejects condemnation as unnecessary and as veridically inappropriate to the circumstances at hand. It is unnecessary because, John says, humans today are already inclined to condemn these errors themselves. Humans today are inclined to condemn these errors themselves because they are, he insists, “ever more deeply convinced of the paramount dignity of the human person and of his perfection as well as of the duties which that implies.” In particular, humans realize that violence cannot solve the “grave problems which afflict them.” In his address John may have been stylizing
his point for rhetorical effect and to set out a pole in relation to which the council would have to orient itself. However—and this point must be kept in mind—the supposition that the world to which the church addresses itself is basically good and, indeed, in terms of the nature of humanity, is defined by an intrinsic potential for the supernatural functions to parameterize the logic of pastoral practice put forward during the course of the council, as well as the way in which the object of that practice—human dignity—will be imagined.

The crux of a pastoral relation with the modern world, for John, lies in this: “ Humans today are convinced of the paramount dignity of the human.” This means, in John’s view, that the church does not need to convert its teaching authority to pastoral practice through condemnation. Rather, the church needs to calibrate its practices of truth speaking to the task of orienting the modern world toward a proper relation to human dignity. The fact that the modern world already recognizes human dignity and thereby also recognizes the authoritative status of dignity in guiding human affairs means that the world is also prepared to be shepherded by the church. The dignity of the human is paramount and calls for a response in terms of the orientation of human affairs: the world recognizes it, and the church is uniquely positioned to articulate the terms of that response. The magisterium needs to be mobilized in view of, and in response to, the need to articulate the meaning and demands of human dignity.

It is at this conjuncture of a shared persuasion, between the church and the modern world, that human dignity needs to be cared for that the magisterium finds that it can be fitted to a pastoral logic for the ecclesia ad extra. Equipped by an understanding of the natural and the supernatural, the magisterium is able to read the signs of the times in such a way as to discern what the dignity demands in relation to the particular contours of modern situations. And by articulating what the church understands and discerns about human dignity and its demands, it will be able to “raise men” to the actualization of their proper dignity. It is in this way that doctrine can become “life giving,” even for those outside the church. It follows for John that the modern world itself, for all of its failings, is marked by a “lofty dignity.” This dignity occasions an ensemble of elements that will be definitive of the logic of the church’s relation to the world: dignity is properly human (“a more human life”), life is ordained by God (“in the life of Christ”), and it is the responsibility of the church to connect these together (“her life-given doctrine . . . efficacious in promoting concord, just peace, and the brotherly unity of all”).

Doctrine, taken up as a mode of pastoral care for the world, will need to be rendered as a mode of truth speaking by way of which the world can come to understand how to live in a manner such that human dignity can be actualized. The church can shepherd the world. It can shepherd the world not because it is able
to submit the world to its internal mechanisms of discipline or governance. It can shepherd the world through its insights and sense of proper human orientation concerning a shared object of concern. Dignity is, after all, proper to the human, and humans will be capable of fully actualizing this properly human dignity if, amid the vicissitudes of modern life, they are properly guided. John is not calling the church to cultivate dignity through the direct formation of the world or to offer dignity to the world by mediating grace. Rather, he is calling them to illuminate the character of dignity and clarify its requirements for the modern world.

John's address culminates with a question: “What is salvation?” He answers: it is the will of God for all humanity. And what is the will of God? The orientation of human nature to the supernatural. This is not just a directive for individual human life; it is also a destiny for humanity as a universal collective. John puts it this way: God wills salvation for all. Salvation, *salutis*, the good, will be realized in the form of “complete and firm unity of minds.” Salvation is the peace of unity. This is a classical proposition, and John cites Augustine in making this concluding point. What is distinctive here, what makes John's assertion contemporary and not merely traditional is that salvation understood as human unity is connected to the work of the magisterium as an organ of pastoral direction for human minds and to a moment in the history of the world in which “humanity” has come to recognize its own unity in dignity. The goal of salvation, understood as the actualization of human unity, can be achieved through knowledge of how to live in the modern world. In asserting the church’s ability to provide that knowledge, John borrows Augustine’s classic distinction: “in order that the earthly city may be brought to the resemblance of that heavenly city where truth reigns, charity is the law, and whose extent is eternity.” The pastoral relation of the church and the world has as its aim the work of helping to bring the earthly city to a resemblance of the heavenly city. Moreover, as Augustine first suggested, such a resemblance can be read as the actualization in the earthly city of the order that was first proper to it—the innate dignity of humans and the possibility of the historical flourishing of dignity understood as the actualization of humanity. This is a central purpose of the Second Vatican Council, according to the opening address. This, for John, was a structuring rationale for the council: the salvation of humanity through right knowledge of the truth of its unity in dignity.

John closes with a summary diagnosis: the church as a pastorate is well fitted to the needs of the modern world. The ecumenical council is called to order not only for the sake of the church, per se—though the rethinking of doctrine, liturgy, the role of laity, etc. also forms part of the rationale for the council. But most centrally and above all, the council is called to order by the needs of the modern world and the capacity and responsibility of the church, as a teacher, to meet those needs. The
The Church, the Secular, and Pastoral Power

church, of course, has always understood itself as being responsible for all: the missiological impulse is basic to the Christian affirmation of a gospel. What is distinctive about John’s vision for Vatican II is the proposition that the world of today is neither figured as existing outside the church as that which is estranged and in need of return, nor is it figured as within the church as if a deviant or lost sheep to be reprimanded and redirected. The world is portrayed neither as having fallen to the exterior nor as being in tension with the interior. Rather, and quite distinctively, the world is figured as sharing an identity with the church without therein coinciding with the church. The world and the church stand together, in some sense, at the intersection of “heaven and earth.” That intersection is named using a moral repertoire whose coordinating term is human dignity.

John’s opening address framed Vatican II as a venue within which the junction between heaven and earth can be rethought and as a venue through which the proper means of inhabiting that junction can be brought to articulation: “We might say that heaven and earth are united in the holding of the Council—the saints of heaven to protect our work, the faithful of the earth continuing in prayer to the Lord, and you, seconding the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in order that the work of all may correspond to the modern expectations and needs of the various peoples of the world.” Salvation of humanity may, on the surface, not seem to be a need of the church, strictly speaking, but rather a need of the world, a need for which the church must be made responsive and adequate. But, as I will discuss in the excursus later in this book, the salvation of the pastor is always caught up in and determined by the salvation of the flock. In calling the council to think about the church’s pastoral relation to the modern world, John is also calling the church to rethink the terms of its own good, its own salvation. The church’s own salvation turns in part on its ability to refashion doctrine as an art of care for human dignity.

On a rhetorical level all of this is put forward as if it is longstanding and simply in continuity with the history of the church’s exercise of pastoral power. And indeed, many of the elements invoked have been part of theological and ecclesiastical reflection since the early church. But in John’s address these elements are reworked, connected with new elements, and rendered as a timely and not a perennial problem. John’s statement of a fortuitous convergence of humanity and the church in the modern world proved to be a major source of contention throughout the council—as did the connected formulation of the mode by which the church plays a vital role in the actualization of humanity’s immanent capacities. John placed at the center of the council’s deliberation a theological contest that, for many of the bishops and theologians present, including John and John’s theological mentors, comprised a bitter struggle over the question of the nature of sin, history, and the church, which had been a defining feature of the longstanding fight over the appro-
priate role of the church in a post-Reformation world. John’s implied position on this controversial set of themes—a sense that the church’s vocation lies in orienting nature to its supernatural ends—would itself prove controversial, in part because it seemed to be a central theological warrant for his affirmation of the modern world and for a posture of openness and mutual enrichment in the church’s relation to the modern world. Some of John’s critics—the critics of aggiornamento—saw in this affirmation unwarranted doctrinal innovation and an inversion of authority. It was doctrinal innovation because it seemed to make the “fallen” world less dependent on the mediating authority of the church in matters of salvation. It was an inversion of authority because it seemed to place the world at the center, making its needs definitive for the church’s pastoral practices. John and his supporters offered the rebuttals that had been articulated by their theological teachers, who similarly had been accused of introducing a nouvelle theologie: they argued that a more integral view of nature and grace had, in fact, defined the church’s understanding of its pastoral role prior to the modern world and was therefore actually less modern than the “traditional” views of their critics.

Equally important and vehement were the criticisms of those who repudiated John’s optimistic view of modernity not so much in the name of a different theology of grace, or a contrastive theory of the church’s status, or its authority to mediate salvation. Rather, these critics understood modernity to be defined by the creation of new forms of exploitation, domination, and alienation. Like the disputes over the accusation of “new theology,” these criticisms of optimism could not be avoided. Immediately following his opening address, John’s theological advisors set to work composing and circulating a statement underscoring the desire of the pope and the other councilors to address themselves and their work to the suffering and hopeless, those impoverished and diminished by the modern world. The twist—and the continued justification offered for John’s affirmative pastoral disposition toward the world’s future—was the proposition that the global community, despite pervasive violence and exploitation, had actually begun to develop in such a way and to such an extent that the possibility of global human unity, the possibility of the actualization of humanity, was within reach, albeit not without the church’s orienting pastoral care.

SCHEMA XIII

If one can see, retrospectively, how John’s opening address gave articulation to his aspirations for the council and to the conceptual and pragmatic elements that would continue to occupy the council fathers, as well as how these elements might be assembled such that the concept of human dignity could be put forward as an
answer to the problem of the church’s pastoral problem to the modern world, the document known as Schema XIII, which would become Gaudium et spes, can be seen as the council’s most sustained and direct response to John’s call for reformulation and renewal. Initially drafted in preparation for the council, Schema XIII was first taken up and debated by a subcommittee of council fathers during what is typically referred to as the “third period” of the council—October and November 1964. The theological, political, and pastoral differences over the schema would not be resolved that fall, and the need for further work on it was part of a justification for the addition of a fourth councilial period slated for late 1965. Given its direct relationship to the stated rationale for Vatican II, work on the schema received considerable attention. Official participants, as well as Christian and non-Christian observers, came to look at the schema as a definitive response of the church to the political and social challenges of the twentieth century (from poverty and capitalism to biology and birth control) and as an indication of the role the Roman Catholic Church planned to take with respect to these challenges. One of the principal theological participants in the development of the schema was the theologian Yves Congar, who also played a significant role in the political negotiations that finally brought it to completion. Congar described the schema as the council’s “promised land.”

The political path that the schema followed to its final form need not be recounted in detailed fashion. A brief sketch of the practical difficulties facing the members of the subcommittee assigned the task of reworking it, however, reinforces the point that very little about the schema could be taken for granted as obvious or self-evident—despite the declarative tone of the document in its final form. Like all of the council’s constitutions, the development of Schema XIII was marked by contests, difficulties, and rivalries as well as by patience, labor, thought, and negotiation. From 1962 to 1965 the elements that would make up the schema passed through multiple preparatory commissions: a mixed commission of members from the Doctrinal Commission and from the Commission for the Lay Apostolate, with its own various and multiple subcommissions, and it was reviewed during the plenary periods with the entire body of council fathers. The schema was revised dozens of times in response to the theological and pastoral disagreements of commission members, advisory theologians, and unofficial redrafts submitted by national groupings of bishops. At several junctures political differences among commission secretaries, the general secretary of the council, and the Holy See threatened to table the schema altogether. Commission participants, council fathers as well as theological consultants, were eliminated from the process or strategically added. The fact that the drafting of the schema was finished at all and subsequently voted in by the council fathers as one of the four Constitutions of Vatican II is a tribute to the pro-
ductive organizational machinery of the council and belies the fierce disagreements that emerged—and persist today—concerning its meaning and requirements. It is more striking still that Schema XIII was successful in addressing the core problems articulated by John in his opening address, despite subsequent difficulties in turning that articulation into practice.

A principal outcome of these difficulties, which I will focus on here, is the way in which “humanity” was ultimately figured in connection with “dignity,” and in connection with the church as a venue called to a pastoral responsibility for dignified humanity. The core problem was, of course, felt throughout the council. Schema XIII is distinctive in that it took up the pastoral problem of the church and the modern world explicitly and directly and in that it generated pressures for how this external relation would affect the church in its internal relations. Schema XIII, in this sense, is not only significant as a textual artifact of the council’s work—a major theological document and reference point in contemporary canon law. It is certainly this, too; dozens of subsequent statements made by the Vatican concerning the view of the church on, say, scientific and technological developments cite the Pastoral Constitution as a theological and pastoral warrant. The schema is also, and equally, significant as a point of convergence or consolidation at which a set of problems set into motion well before Vatican II were further sharpened, combined, and given focused articulation. Schema XIII in this sense can be thought of as a vector point at which a number of prior problems converged, were given synthetic and operable form, and from which a set of relatively manageable solutions have subsequently been derived. These solutions are ultimately anchored in a single pastoral object: dignified humanity—an object that could then be referred to as self-evident and as self-evidently in a pastoral relation with the church.

In the process of the schema’s formulation and drafting three practical difficulties were encountered, strategically and theologically conceptualized, and made the object of argument and political maneuvering. These difficulties were encountered by the first subcommission in the spring of 1964, and they exercised an ongoing influence on the commission’s deliberations and drafting. The first of these difficulties concerned the audience for the schema. Who was it actually addressed to? On some straightforward level the answer was “the world.” The schema, after all, was a response to John’s call for the council to inaugurate a renewed pastoral relation to the modern world. But it was not at all clear what, practically, that could mean in terms of the work of the subcommission: was the schema written “for the world” as an instruction to the pastorate or the laity, or was it to be directly addressed to the *ecclesia ad extra*, and hence did it need to be formulated in terms that those beyond the church could take seriously? John called the church not only to “shoulder responsibility” for the problems of the modern world but to do so “before
If expectations were high for the outcome of Schema XIII, this was in part because the challenge put before the council was not simply to act as an organ of the internal magisterium of the church, not simply to debate the church’s internal self-understanding and self-direction, but also to rise to the challenge of giving form to the teaching authority in and for the world. The pastoral relation between the church and the world might thereby be facilitated. As Paul VI would put it in his encyclical *Ecclesiam suam*, which he delivered on the eve of plenary consideration of Schema XIII, the church must engage in “dialogue” with the contemporary world to the end of “serving” the world. So, a first practical difficulty faced by the sub-commissions composing the schema was the problem of audience: who or what is this “world” to whom they would be offering this schema?

This first practical difficulty was given articulation by the influential French Dominican Marie-Dominique Chenu. If the difficulty was the audience, the question was: is the church speaking to something outside of itself? To what extent does the church, in its pastoral vocation, address that which is outside of it, strictly speaking? A predicate of much of the council’s reflections on the modern world was that the church exists in solidarity with the human race. *Lumen gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, which was considered in the same session as Schema XIII, stated that the church is the instrument and sign of salvation for “the whole human race.” Chenu wanted to know: what should the council fathers make of this? The problem turns, in part, on the conception of the church’s temporality, that is, its relation to history. John had already indicated that the church involves a double temporality. The question here was pragmatic: how is this double status to be parsed, which aspects are to be emphasized, and how should it inform the style of the Pastoral Constitution? Chenu and others, including Pope Paul, held that the church existed as part of and therefore within the history of the world’s salvation. The church is part of that history in its concrete form. The church can thus be thought of as the collection of believers who bear witness to a salvation to which all are called and thus who also share in the world’s situation. The church shoulders responsibility for the world’s needs because it shares in those needs; they are its own needs.

Chenu’s position carried significant pastoral implications. If the church considers itself as having its actuality within the history of salvation (which of course it must, at least in part) then Schema XIII should call for and enable a regularized practice of critical theological self-adjustment: the world of today needs to be characterized and recharacterized as it changes, and the church needs to think continually about how to adjust its modes of action and understanding to those needs. It is not surprising that some council fathers worried that the worth and authority of the church under these conditions would ultimately be overly determined by its re-
sponsibility to the world in its inner-historical life and struggles. The concrete challenges of the world would be definitive for the church’s pastoral responsibilities and thereby its pastoral self-constitution. These difficulties ultimately carried through beyond Vatican II, evidenced by the still unresolved and divisive debates over the status of Liberation Theology, which draws on an understanding of the church’s inner-historical character to identify with the political aspirations of the Catholic and non-Catholic poor. Against the position staked out by Chenu and others were those who placed emphasis on the supernatural and eternal characteristics of the church as “the bride of Christ” and as the inheritor of Christ’s extraworldly authority. These critics conceived of the church as being especially graced by a divinely secured position across history and in this sense “outside” of the modern world. The church’s teachings and its judgments are not first of all calibrated to the concrete challenges of a given situation, even if finally directed to that situation. They are defined, rather, by its “sacred deposit” of revelation and the authority to interpret that revelation. The distinction is, of course, one of emphasis. But emphasis inflects ramifications. To the extent that the church thinks of itself as a historical reality, its pastoral relation to the world is constituted from within. To the extent the church considers itself a supernatural reality, its pastoral relation to the world is constituted from without. One might say, then, that the persistent practical difficulty concerning audience, with all it entails rhetorically and philosophically, was formulated as a problem of how to map the church on an axis of exteriority/interiority with regard to its relation to the world’s history.

A second practical difficulty, closely related to the first, concerned the obvious tensions between the church’s address to “humanity,” understood as a unified reality, and the actual historical and moral fragmentation of people in the world. A challenge for the members of the subcommittee working on schema XIII consisted in proclaiming the unity of the church and the world in a bond of pastoral care while accounting for and being realistic about the needs created by the world’s actual disunity. Is the world’s disunity a false appearance, covering over the essential and timeless unity of the human family? Is disunity one of the evils of the modern world that needs to be overcome? Or, put the other way, the question was: how should the subcommission conceptualize the unity of humanity? Is it a hoped-for reality only to be achieved in the fullness of time? Is it actual already but just not yet complete? Is it a primordial truth or a teleological vision? All these framed the problem of the extent to which, or the fashion in which, all of “humanity” was real as a unity because of a “common and integral human vocation.” Put differently, there was no question of disputing the essential unity of humanity, per se. The question was: how it should be conceptualized, how should the church interpret the notion of a common calling, which makes humanity unified? On some level this was not,
theologically speaking, a new problem. Christian thought is rife with discussions of realities that are “already” but “not yet.” A particular difficulty here, however, was that the schema was not intended to be a theological treatise but hortatory and thereby pastoral. Moreover, part of John’s reading of the auspicious character of the modern world was that, for all of its failings, it had created the planetary conditions under which a theological vision for a unified humanity might be practically realized. Being pastoral and situated, the schema was not any less conceptual, and the stakes of its conceptualization were all the higher for not being able to rely on the relatively esoteric luxuries of a theological treatise. Theological negotiations had to be distilled and given form as an instrument susceptible of being turned into practice. The phrasing of *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia* typified the problem: doctrine must function to help humans “understand well what they really are, what their lofty dignity and their purpose are,” and doctrine must do this so as to “influence the numerous fields of human activity.”

The question of how the relation between a unifying lofty purpose and a diversity of human practices ought to be articulated was pressed with intensity in the spring of 1964 during the early drafting of the schema. Among others, the German Jesuit Karl Rahner found the treatment of this question profoundly inadequate. He found the distinction between the natural and the supernatural aspects of human vocation confused and argued that clearer definition was needed. In September 1964, one month prior to the first plenary debate on the schema, two new subcommittees were formed to respond to Rahner’s and others’ persistent dissatisfactions with the draft. The first subcommission took up the question of how the church should go about constituting the forms of expertise needed to “read the signs of the times,” which I will describe below. The second subcommission was given the task of working on the problem of theological definitions, especially as they pertained to the question of human vocation. Rahner was appointed to this second commission and undertook the task of reconceptualizing nature and the supernatural.

As I described above, the integralist controversy—the controversy over how to interpret the relation of nature and the supernatural, the relation of nature and grace—formed a crucial part of the immediate theological background to decision to convene Vatican II. Arguably the most important figure in that controversy was the Jesuit theologian Henri de Lubac. De Lubac’s writings on the relation of nature and the supernatural had strongly emphasized the ways in which this relation critically informs the role and function of the church, especially at the level of how pastoral work is organized and justified. Indeed, throughout his theological labors, de Lubac devoted considerable energy to demonstrating the mutually constitutive links between theological anthropology and ecclesiology. This critical and constitutive relation became central to the unfolding debates over Schema XIII and
were framed using John's language of human vocation. Rahner and others felt the shadow of de Lubac's work and insisted that the anthropology-ecclesiology formula be dealt with in precise terms.

This effectively meant two things. First, they insisted that the task of clarifying nature and supernatural dimensions of human vocation depended, in part, on determining which modes of reasoning and analysis would be included in the discussion and therefore which theological and non-theological consultants would be invited to contribute to the subcommission's formulations. Second, they insisted that the task of clarifying nature and the supernatural also depended in part on how evil was (and was not) being conceptualized as essential to the constitution of the modern world. The subcommission needed to decide on the mode and extent to which the evil of the modern world should be included in their characterization of human vocation. The problem was easy enough to frame, theologically and ecclesiologically. It was, however, politically difficult to resolve. In thinking about the human, the church, and the world of today, to what extent should the excesses, exclusions, injustices, and other evils of the modern world be definitive for characterizing the logic of the church's pastoral relation and the object of the church's pastoral care? Bishops from South America, Africa, Asia, and from communist parts of the world argued vehemently in favor of including a strong emphasis on evil in defining the character of the modern world. Political, social, and economic developments of the twentieth century had, of course, been devastating for much of the world. John's optimism about the modern world, which was central to his vision for and justification of the council, was flatly refused and contested. These bishops argued that the schema on the church and the modern world should be oriented less by an ideal vision of a common and integral human vocation and more by the effort to underscore the myriad ways in which such a integral vocation is actually and actively violated, fragmented, and rendered increasingly unlikely in and by the modern world. Theologically speaking, Thomistic reflections on “human nature” were basically pitted against Augustinian tropes of a world enslaved to sin. That John optimistically framed the world as being on the threshold of transformation was taken by some to be at best naive and at worst deceptive and debilitating of any meaningful pastoral relation to modern power.36

John's critics argued that the more the evil of the world is emphasized in the church's understanding of the modern world, the better able the church will be to position itself outside of that evil and thereby constitute itself as solace to those exploited by the world's injustices. The more the potential goodness of the world is emphasized, by contrast, the more likely it is that the church will position itself as responsible for simply facilitating the unfolding of otherwise natural human capacities, which, however distracted by false desires or perverted by evil, basically just
come down to an issue of proper guidance. To put it simply, John's critics problematized the unity of humanity's vocation in relation to the question of how to think about humanity's need for radical critique, repentance, and transformation. The question of the evil of the modern world would never be satisfactorily sorted out, as attested to by the still-lengthening history of debates between Liberation Theology and its Vatican critics. But the problem of how to account for evil in the pastoral relation to the modern world contributed directly to the form ultimately given to the church's anthropology of the dignified human and its understanding of the church's responsibility for that dignity.

The third difficulty, connected to the other two, concerned the question of expertise. Those involved in drafting schema XIII understood their task as centrally involving the biblical injunction from the book of Matthew to "read the signs of the times." They framed this injunction as a hermeneutical challenge: the question of how to interpret the needs and difficulties of the modern world in light of the magisterium's patrimony of eternal truths. The practical difficulty was whether and how nontheological forms of expertise were needed in providing a satisfactory account of the affairs of the world. What forms of expert knowledge were needed for the church, in the modern world, to take up successfully and effectively its longstanding hermeneutic labor? To what extent and in what ways could the modern world be satisfactorily described by theology, the church, and the life of faith, and to what extent were the resources of other modes of insight and inquiry needed—from philosophy, the social sciences, biology, and so on? The question of expertise was more or less latent in John's formulation of the challenge to the magisterium to take seriously the modes of reasoning characteristic of the modern world and in that way give "exceptional form" to the church's doctrinal truth as its pastoral mission. Following the first sustained round of drafts in spring of 1964, this question was put on the table in terms of who should be invited to provide advice to the council fathers: to what extent should the schema be informed by the theological sciences alone, or by the social and human sciences as well? The first half-dozen drafts of the schema testify to the subcommission's inability to resolve this question to everyone's satisfaction. The drafts were alternatively characterized by lesser and greater philosophical and sociological emphases. By the summer of 1964 a pragmatic and structural resolution was proposed whereby the introductory sections of the schema were almost exclusively theological and philosophical. The subsequent sections, including the appendices, presented the church's position on specific modern challenges (marriage and the family, culture, economic and social life, promoting solidarity, war and peace, and the like). These subsequent sections included diagnoses of the modern world framed using the analytic terms of the human sciences.

This partition of the report was partially helpful in addressing the veridictional
question. But it left unanswered the underlying conceptual difficulties concerning the place of modern modes of reasoning and truth speaking in helping the church read the “signs of the times” and in formulating the terms of its pastoral relation to the modern world. As I will discuss in the next chapter, the council fathers put themselves in something of a double bind. On the one side, their diagnosis of the modern world turned on the notion that scientific knowledge per se could not tell us how to live our lives. As such, the modern world, in which the sciences had become dominant, was proceeding in an unguided fashion and therefore away from the actualization of human dignity. Their diagnosis, one might say, accepted Max Weber’s dictum that the modern sciences “cannot tell you what to do.” On the other side, however, the council fathers’ feel for the social and economic ills of the modern world depended in part on insights articulated by sociologists and others. The question, then, was how to incorporate these modern understandings of the modern world in such a way as to account for the fact that they could not “tell one what to do.”

The bind was obviously not unique to deliberations over the schema. Not only was it immanent to John’s rationale for the council; it had been a major topic of theological dispute since at least the middle of the nineteenth century. In fact, many of the theologians whose work informed the rationale for the council—de Lubac, Congar, and others—had been deeply formed by efforts since the late nineteenth century to formulate theologies that explicitly rejected the terms of the modern separation of “natural philosophy” from theological reasoning. These debates now needed to be transformed into equipment for pastoral care. In the view of many participants, the material problems and needs of the modern world simply could not be sufficiently well understood and effectively addressed without making some use of extratheological modes of reasoning.

Those who held that the church’s “patrimony of truth” was sufficient appealed to something of a form-substance distinction: the substance of doctrine needed only to be faithfully rendered in a form indexed to the modern world. But this formulation seemed to suggest that the problem was simply a diagnostic, rhetorical, and communicative one. The question of the signs of the times was, however, more profound than this and entailed the question of the extent to which the church would allow for the reformulation of its self-understanding, implicit in the pastoral challenge of Schema XIII, to be shaped by the use of distinctive and differentiated modes of reasoning. The question thereby consisted of the extent to which the conceptions of the world produced by those modes of reasoning should be incorporated into the church’s understanding of its objects of pastoral care and thereby how they might weigh on the question of how that object should be cared for. The difficulty, in the end, pivoted on the pastoral question: if the needs of the world contribute to defining the pastoral vocation of the church, then in what ways and to
what extent should those needs be articulated by modes of reasoning other than the theological? To what extent will the exceptional form of the magisterial pastorate consist of knowing and speaking the truth in extratheological terms?

Work on the schema took the form of a kind of combative but forward-moving set of exchanges between natural law and the sciences, deductive and inductive exercises, historical and ahistorical ontologies. But if one tracks the interactions and negotiations it is clear that drafts of the text progressed without really resolving the underlying question of who ultimately should be allowed to contribute to interpreting the signs of the times. The question of expertise was taken particularly seriously by Chenu and theologians of so-called *nouvelle theologie*, for whom the rejection of a presumed split between nature and the supernatural carried with it a rejection of a presumed split between natural and supernatural knowledge. But even these theologians could not really, in the end, simply dismiss out of hand knowledge of the world produced by the modern social sciences, and so the practical difficulty stood. The answer to it would determine such matters as who would be invited as contributing consultants (for example, the bishops of South America wanted more representatives from Third World countries, French bishops wanted experts on current trends in humanist philosophy, Polish bishops wanted experts capable of sustained analysis of state-sponsored communism, etc.). The question of whether or not signs of the times would be taken seriously as *loci theologici*, resources for theology and not just objects of theological reflection, needed to be resolved.  

Through the first plenary work on Schema XIII and during the third council period and the ensuing year of revision, formal and informal debate over the question of the signs of the times remained in play. The issue, sharpened to its finest point, was articulated as a problem of conciliar genre: which type of document would the schema be in its final form, and, hence, what kind of lasting authority would it have? Could an ecumenical council, a venue traditionally used to consider questions of doctrine taken to be universally valid, produce a constitutional document pastoral in character? Conciliar constitutions were taken by many to be reserved for the formulation of doctrine. Pastoral matters were taken to be matters of the application of doctrine. Doctrine was timeless, pastoral concerns timely.

As late as the weeks prior to the final council period (September 1965), German, French, and Italian bishops were calling for the schema to be tabled and left to a postconciliar commission. And if not tabled, they asked for the schema to be reduced to the status of a “letter” and not a constitution—a political resolution to the problem of authority and genre. The requests were ultimately rejected, and the argument was made that even with these tensions unresolved, the schema constituted an important instrument of reorientation for the church’s future pastoral relations to the world. Moreover, the claim that the Pastoral Constitution represented a
fundamental betrayal of conciliar genre depended on a prior presumption that the doctrinal and pastoral needed to be strictly distinguished and even separated. But such a separation would have put in question the basic rationale for the council itself as articulated by John XXIII, which, of course, in some minds it did.

TOWARD PASTORAL EQUIPMENT

The effort to divide doctrine and pastoral power—to position one as upstream and conceptual, the other as downstream and practical—can be thought of as a rejection of the design parameters for pastoral power that John first put in place in his opening address. He had given the council fathers the difficult charge of constituting Vatican II as a venue for the doctrinal work of the magisterium as well as a venue for the elaboration of new pastoral practices. In setting out his designs for the council, John introduced the problem of pastoral power in such a way that there could be no clean or total separation of the doctrinal from the pastoral. The veridictory character of the former and the jurisdictional demands of the latter needed to be interfaced, mutually adjusted, and combined into a distinctive mode and form of care for the world. John’s call for such a mode and form was predicated on his sense of a kind of ontological and temporal parallel between things human and things ecclesial, a parallel in which humanity and the church are taken to be pastorally fitted to each other.

John’s expectation that pastoral power could be made something more, something other than just the direction of the flock or the condemnation of errors, that it could also be constituted as care for “all men” of “our times,” was based on the presumption that the council fathers could convert the church’s doctrinal authority into a form of pastoral practice adequate to, and capable of, caring for the world of today. The task consisted in designing modes of reasoning and acting by way of which the timeless doctrine of the church could be rendered as a response to and clarification of the problems of the modern world. To meet the demands of this task, the council fathers would need to connect and resolve the series of ontological, methodological, and philosophical problems that I’ve outlined in this chapter; what is the church such that it is capable of caring for the world? What is the world such that the church is susceptible to being cared for by the church without ceasing to be the world? How is the pastoral venue of the church to be related to its object of care? And how is all of this to be articulated through the magisterium yet in such a way that it is acceptable “before the world”? These problems required the council fathers to specify the object of reflection and concern in relation to which each of these questions could be worked out as a single ensemble. That object and ensemble, as I will explain in the next chapter, was the figure of human dignity.

Two orienting diagnoses can be ventured at this point. The first reiterates a point
I made in the introduction. Whatever the function and significance of the figure of human dignity today, that figure has been brought to articulation in part by the fact that it offered an answer to a constitutional, or reconstitutional, difficulty for several venues charged with the task of caring for the affairs of the modern world. In the case of Vatican II, this constitutional difficulty was framed as the challenge of giving form to a pastoral relation to the modern world. This challenge was taken up as the labor of imagining the church as a pastorate for and to those beyond the church. The object and objective of that pastoral relation is human dignity. Human dignity was made the object and objective insofar as it provided a term that answered the council fathers’ work on the problem of the pastorate, grace, and the modern world. Another way of saying this is that human dignity as it is named and talked about today is, in part, an artifact of a response to these problems.

The conception of human dignity that emerged from Vatican II was characterized by a relative singularity and coherence despite the problematized field of relations within which it was brought to articulation. This singularity and coherence is remarkable in that it was fashioned through the theological and political negotiations of more than two thousand council fathers and four hundred advisory theologians, the diversity and number of theological contests inherited, in part, from a century of debates set in motion by the first Vatican Council, and through the strictures, mandates, and consequences of the council as a unique class of ecclesial event with a specific doctrinal and pastoral authority. The singularity and coherence of the formulation of human dignity is significant not simply because it indicates theological or ecclesiological novelty. It is significant because it brought to order a range of longstanding problems and because of the mode of pastoral intervention it facilitated in view of those problems.

The second orienting diagnosis is that at Vatican II human dignity was made into an object for the reconfiguration of pastoral power. The broader significance of this reconfiguration will form the substance of this book’s “Diagnostic Excursus.” Here it is enough to reiterate three important characteristics of this reconfiguration. First, in his address to the United Nations Paul VI suggested that the church and the United Nations share a kind of defining pastoral mission: they are both pastoral venues of a sort. Paul certainly did not mean that the United Nations should concern itself with the shepherding of the flock or with the daily conduct of souls. Nor did he mean that the church should stand alongside other sovereign powers as an organ of international government. Rather, what Paul indicated by this characterization is that both the church and the United Nations are venues in which a mode and form of power is called for that allows them both to sort through a classic pastoral dilemma: omnes et singulatim. The United Nations and the church must find a way to care for all humanity and each human.
The second characteristic is that this reconfiguration of pastoral power is to be carried out without recourse to familiar and longstanding instruments of governance—whether ecclesial or political. The church was already equipped with a plurality of mechanisms for conducting daily conduct at the level of the souls of individual Christians, congregations, and the Roman Catholic Church taken as a whole. But the demand made by John that the council fathers constitute a new form of pastoral relation is predicated on the notion that the church can form a kind of pastorate for the *ecclesia ad extra*. So, whatever it means to take up the mandate of caring for all and each one in relation to humanity and humans, it must be taken up without direct recourse to the church’s familiar instruments of spiritual government. This second characteristic, as I try to show in the next chapter, justifies the design of what could be called hermeneutic equipment: equipment for the interpretation of the modern world by way of which the magisterium can help orient, even if not directly conduct, the life and actualization of humanity.

A third characteristic, which I have not really unpacked but which is the subject of the next chapter, is that the object of this reconfigured pastoral power is human dignity. More specifically it is human dignity conceived as archonic—as intrinsic, primordial, and commanding. This conception of things human proves to be a useful response to the two-part demand of *omnes et singulatim* and the relative absence of mechanisms for the pastoral conduct of “all and each one,” when taken up at the scale of humanity and every human. Dignity as primordial, as archonic, is not the kind of pastoral object that requires vigilant and continual cultivation. It is, after all, given. Dignity, however, can certainly be violated or compromised and, under the sign of the modern world, may in fact be quite vulnerable to violation or compromise. Whatever form of pastoral practices are needed, they do not need to consist in generating dignity, per se. Rather, they need to consist in guarding dignity from violation and compromise by providing humanity with a better understanding of its own ends, and in this they can help cultivate a life calibrated to its proper ends without disruption, misdirection, or blockage. This does, of course, raise the practical question: to what extent is the human capable of actualizing its own proper ends without the church’s intervention? This question will continue to trouble the church well after the close of the council. Whatever a pastoral relation with the world consists in, it must take account of difficulties connected to the relation of nature and grace, the relation of nature and the supernatural, and the church’s role in mediating that relation. In any case, given the implications of the papal address and the initial work on Schema XIII, human dignity in the “world of today” requires a venue through which practices of care, consisting in interpreting the meaning and challenges of the modern world, can be formulated and facilitated.