JOSE MARIO B. MAXIMIANO

THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES IN THE METHODOLOGY OF THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH: AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL APPROACH

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Dr. Augustus SARMIENTO

Dr. Xaverius SESÉ

Coram Tribunali, die 25 mensis maii anni 1991, hanc dissertationem ad Lauream Candidatus palam defendit

Secretarius Facultatis

Dr. Ioseph Emmanuel ZUMAQUERO

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In 1988, the congregation for Catholic Education published a guideline for the study and teaching of the social doctrine of the Church. Among others, the Holy Office underscores its methodology that is developed in three steps: to see, to judge and to act.

**Seeing** is perception and study of real problems and their causes, the analysis of which belongs to the human and social sciences. **Judging** is the interpretation of that same reality in the light of the sources of social doctrine which determine the judgment pronounced with regard to social phenomena and their ethical implications. In this intermediate phase is found the function proper to the Magisterium... **Acting** aims...to translate it (principles) concretely into forms of action, participation and commitment (GUIDELINE, 7).

The operative method of the social doctrine turns itself, in the order of praxis, into an indispensable structure of dialogue between the Church and the world. For this reason, the Church cannot possibly offer, in an adequate manner, guidelines for pastoral action without a sufficient analysis of the social reality. Knowledge leads to action. Hence the necessity of «seeing» or what the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* calls «to scrutinize» the real social condition of man in the world today. The method, consequentially, has to be inductive and analytic, that is, to begin from the particular in order to arrive to the universal. Here enters the concept of the signs of the times in the whole picture of the treatise.

To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this pre-
sent life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its expectations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics (*Gaudium et spes*, 4).

The Church as the People of God has the duty of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. The theological concept of the signs of the times takes its proper locus in the methodological process of the social doctrine, in the first step (to see): this is the content of the dissertation. And the method is epistemological. The author is concerned to systematically articulate his presentation of data in order to prove this theoretical premise, starting with the clarification of some philosophico-theological notion and presuppositions, both traditional and contemporary, about what is known as the historical heritage, its methodology and the signs of the times.

The tripartite (see-judge-act) dimension facilitates the inductive-deductive process of the methodology of the social doctrine. The encyclical *Mater et magistra* (1961), the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* (1965) and other official documents that followed were characterised by this method. Nevertheless, there is no magisterial document that directly presents and elaborates this method. It is in this specific area of knowledge that this treatise seeks to offer some elucidations and relevant contribution on the level of theory. We recognize the fact that from the historical point of view, the emphasis of consideration was given to the essential themes of the social doctrine or the content and its hermeneutic in the light of faith. The stress, which is all the while more thematic than methodic, is now shifting according to epistemological demand. The method of the social doctrine is being subjected into a process of rigid and critical evaluation. The main object (or in the modern parlance, the subject-matter) of the social doctrine is the social (but in the light of faith) and the first step in grasping it is sociological (but not exclusively). On the other hand, the object of this discourse is the method of the social doctrine and our method is the procedural circle of analysis and synthesis in the Thomistic tradition.

With respect to the interpretation of the social encyclicals, historically what was given emphasis in the Social doctrine is the
matter and not the form, the content and not the method. After 100 years of its existence, one of the many tasks to be carried out is to do an adequate study of the epistemological implications of the tripartite schema of reflection the method of the social doctrine of the Church. The 1988 *Guideline for the Study and Teaching of the Social Doctrine of the Church* speaks of some uncertainties which come up at times concerning the usage of the term *social doctrine* of the Church, but also with regard to its very nature, require a clarification of the epistemological problem which is at the root of these misunderstandings. The author will eventually take the liberty to apply the required clarification of the epistemological problem to the method of the social doctrine itself of which we are concerned without, however, pretending to resolve all problematics *ex professo*.

This excerpt will consist of the part two of the original, *on the signs of the times*. 
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I. THE HISTORICAL DIMENSION OF THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

The text must be understood in its proper context. By context, we mean two different but related settings: the overall setting or situation in which an event occurs and the particular setting of words or concepts where a statement is derived. The overall situation where the event of the signs of the times did occur is the Vatican Council II, which may be properly called the general context, and the particular setting of words is the Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et spes where the «signs of the times» could be found and better comprehended, which may be called the particular context of the phraseology. The first may also be designated as the historical context and the second, the «con-text of the text» or textual context.

1) The general context: Vatican Council II

«A council is an examination of conscience of the Church before God», reflects Hans Kung, a participant of the Vatican Council II.

The crisis is not one of faith as such or of the Church as such...What is being questioned is juridism, not jurisprudence; authoritarianism, not authority itself; legalism, not law; sclerosis not order; uniformity, not unity... The need is for churchmen to meditate in the Lord on the nature and mission of the Church.

When everyone else was thinking of the internal problems of the Church along the line of thought of Pius XII, John XXIII...
was pondering like «a shepherd or a pilot in a storm..»\(^3\). Whose vision—in addition to the *ad intra* order—was pointing to Christian unity and the Church's *ad extra* hustling with the world. In the mind of John XXIII, the Council would be an event «that ought to move heaven and earth», «a starting point for a general renewal and a new and mighty flowering of the Holy Spirit throughout the world»; it would be «an extraordinary Epiphany,» and «a New Pentecost»\(^4\). Bishop Aloysius Wycislo, another participant from the United States, glances back to 1962-1965, says that «the right pope came along the right time. As Pope John saw it, the time was ripe; as he so often put it, he had been reading and studying «the signs of the times»»\(^5\). Indeed the uniqueness of the Council is its willingness to dialogue to the world and to cooperate not only with Christians but with the whole of humanity; «its recognition of the signs of the times as a manifestation of God's will; its resultant stress on the existential and on concrete situations»\(^6\). Cardinal Ruffini of Palermo (Italy), reacting to the announcement of the council, wrote on February 3, 1959: «...The council could consider subject-matter no less copious or less important than was examined by the Council of Trent. Such an event... has already aroused universal interest»\(^7\). Vatican Council II had four sessions from October 11, 1962 to December 8, 1965.

2) *The particular context: «Gaudium et spes»*

It may be well to identify the immediate events and speeches that directly moved the idea of a document on the Church and the World. We are making an abridgement, concentrating on those episodes that are closely related to the signs of the times.

A. While the preparatory commissions made it plain that «the Council was a domestic affair of the Church» besides the fact of the complete absence of laymen from the preparatory commissions and during the First Session\(^8\), John XXIII has sounded what could be baptized as the «World Church», in the words of Karl Rahner: «Each believer...as far as he is a Catholic, is a citizen of the whole world, just as Christ is the adored redeemer of the whole world» (Whitsun homily, *June 5, 1960)»\(^9\) Of the 737 bishops who
participated in the Vatican Council I, mostly came from Europe. In numerical contrast, on the other hand, the 2908 prelates who attended the four sessions of Vatican II came from every corner of the world representing five continents. It was the largest of the ecumenical councils, indeed a council of the Universal Church with the involvement of the laity.

B. «It is a question in fact of bringing the modern world into contact with the vivifying and perennial energies of the Gospel. This supernatural order must also reflect its efficiency in the other order, the temporal one which on so many occasions is unfortunately the only one that occupies and worries man» In an optimistic tone, John quoted the biblical expression «signs of the times» from the Gospel of Matthew 16:4 in his apostolic constitution Humanae salutis of December 25, 1961, in the solemn convocation of the council. In the midst of overwhelming shadows of uncertainty, the «i segni dei tempi» is a sign of hope for the well-being of the Church and the whole of human race.

C. The Archbishop of Malines-Brussels (Belgium), Leon Cardinal Suenens addressed a pastoral letter to his diocese in 1962 where «in this letter he made clear the intense anxiety which was inescapable to a mind as open to the feeling of his contemporaries as his».

D. In the speech of September 11, 1962, John XXIII mentioned the distinction between the Church ad intra and ad extra.

E. At the opening of the council on October 11, 1962, the Holy Father brought up the concept of a dialogue between the Church and the world in his address Ecclesia Christi, lumen gentium. Yet until then, no commission was organized to prepare a text on this topic and there existed no schema under this heading.

F. Another potent impulse in favor of the schema on the Church in the modern world came from Dom Helder Camara who, outside the conciliar sessions, would asked: «Are we to spend our whole time discussing the internal problems of the Church while two-thirds of mankind is starving? What have we to say on the problem of underdevelopment?» Indeed, the history of the famous schema was just embarking from the port and the voyage would be «inevitably long and difficult», according to Father Tromp, the secretary of the Theological Commission.
From hitherto, our discourse will observably be moving from the general historical event of the Vatican II to the more specific textual context where the expression «signs of the times» is to be examined:

(CONTEXT) Vatican Council II -Gaudium et spes- Introductory Statement- Signs of the Times (TEXT)

3) Chronology of the conciliar phraseology «signs of the times»

We shall now examine the expression «signs of the times» in the development of the Introductory Statement from the preparatory period (TEXT 1) to the solemn promulgation of the final version (TEXT 6). In the first place, the phraseology (i.e., the arrangement of words or notions in a sentence) signs of the times is originally evangelical or biblical:

Faciem ergo coeli dijudicare notis: autem signa temporum non potestis scire. Generatio mala et adultera signum quaerit: et signum non dabitur ei, nisi signum Jonae prophetae (words of Jesus in Matthew 16:4).

The signa temporum was picked up and used by John XXIII on two occasions, to wit: in the convocation of the Council in December 25, 1961 by the apostolic constitution Humanae salutis; and in his encyclical Pacem in terris dated April 11, 1963. The phraseology thus became a pontifical notion consisting of two different senses. On the first occasion, in Humanae salutis, the sense is biblical and therefore eschatological, which may be observed by the use of quotation marks (meaning, the phrase is cited directly from the Gospel) while in Pacem in terris, the phraseology signs of the times without quotations, is taken in a general socio-historical sense.

From the biblical to the pontifical, we now proceed to the conciliar phraseology, which is actually our main concern, bearing in mind that the first two have a complex influence o the latter. Let it be understood that there was no clear idea on how to introduce the schema 17(later, schema 13 and finally, the pastoral constitution Gaudium et spes). The majority, for example Msgr. Pavan, wanted to begin with the situation of the world at the pre-
sent day, that is, to take inspiration form the encyclical *Pacem in terris*.

1. Before the start of the council, out of the 70 schemata prepared as *instrumentum laboris*, only one was devoted to social issue, n°7; and this social issue was the solicitude of two commissions, the Theological Commission and the Commission for the Apostolate of the Laity. The first commission produced two documents. The first was the document *De ordine morali christiano* published in the volume of the 70 schemata with a classical stamp of emphasis of the objective character of the moral order. The second was the schema *De ordine sociali* where the theme of the image of God was stated chiefly in order to recall the «purpose of all social life is the human person»\(^{16}\). It is implicit here that from its inception, *Gaudium et spes* is truly a social doctrine the object of which is man. The second commission wrote a separate document entitled *De apostolatu laicorum in actione sociali*. Later revisions «followed the course of the development of all conciliar texts which moved from more abstract, conceptual and timeless perspective towards a biblical concrete and existential (not Existentialist) outlook.»\(^{17}\). We can now understand that from this point in the time the shadow of a decision to choose an existential, empirical and phenomenological notion such as the *signs of the times* was lurking in the collective mind of the commission members, so to speak. We call the combined preparatory text as TEXT 1.

2. At the first meeting in January 1963, the Coordinating Commission was playing with the idea of a schema concentrating around the central axis of *Ecclesia Christi, Lumen Gentium* (John XXIII’s Opening Address). Between January and May, three schemata were composed separately taking the description of concrete situations as its starting point (TEXT 2). Meanwhile the encyclical *Pacem in terris* appeared on April 11, 1963 and with it the phraseology signs of the times without, however, alluding to the Scriptures but as signifying the distinctive characteristics of our age. In Malines (Belgium), an interim text was produced in September under the supervision of Cardinal Suenens. In Zurich (Switzerland), another interim text was composed in French by the Central Subcommission under the title *La participation active de L’Eglise a la construction de monde*. The introduction included five articles:
(1) Solidarity of the Council with mankind, (2) Progress and failure of mankind, (3) Questions to mankind, (4) Those to whom the schema is addressed and its purpose, and (5) The Church as the servant of man. «Agreement had been reached that the schema would be pastoral in character and at the same time that it must not be framed as a message. Similarly there was no thought of composing a theological treatise on earthly realities. The aim was to present a theological interpretation of the world situation at the present day and the tasks it sets for Christians» 18.

3. A second Zurich text was produced between February and November of 1964 (TEXT 3). R. Tucci and C. Moeller noted that «a new theme appeared, that of the signs of the times; the paragraph devoted to this was new» 19. The article 2 of the preface bore the title: Ecclesia perscrutatur «signa temporum». The phraseology was placed in inverted commas to indicate its evangelical sense 20.

Tempus enim signum et vox est, pro Ecclesia et pro hominibus, quatenus secum fert praesentiam Dei, vel, infeliciter, absentiam a Deo, necnon hominis magis minusve consciam ad Dei invocationem, Dei magis minusve patentem ad hominem vocem. In voce ergo temporis vocem Dei audire oportet ita ut in luce fidei praesentes opportunitates et miseriae hominum conscientiis concretum caritatis mandatum adumbrant 21.

TEXT 3 certainly «pointed to a theology of ‘kairos’. Time can be the bearer of a religious meaning, the place of divine Revelation, of man’s approach to God or fall from Him. Some elements of the Salvation History gave their stamp to this text, especially the sentence ‘In voice of time we must hear the voice of God’» 22. Nonetheless, it was heavily criticised by some World Council of Churches observers (letter dated May 29, 1964) arguing that, biblically, it has a precise eschatological significance and this meaning is dissolved in the new context. The appropriation of the Matthean phraseology into schema 13 involves «the danger of reading history in a human way and of indulging in prophetic exegesis of events» One auditor, moreover, in expressing his doubts on the correct hermeneutic of the notion «vox temporis, vox Dei», objected that, since «Christ has spoken once and for all in a uni-
que way», there could never be «new revelations» in history and Christ could never perceived in nature and history».

TEXT 3 was then distributed to the conciliar Fathers, and from this point on, people did speak of schema 13. On the eve of the third session, Paul VI published his first encyclical *Ecclesiam suam* on August 6, 1964, devoting its third part to dialogue between the Church and the world.

4) *Subcommissio de Signis Temporum*

Two subcommissions were set from September 9 to 12, namely: The Dogmatic Subcommission and the *Subcommissio de signis temporum*, instructed to divide the whole schema into three parts: (1) description of facts, (2) theological principles, and (3) applications. The Signs of the Times Subcommission's job consisted of drafting the descriptive part which made possible in Ariccia (February 1965) the composition of what was to become the Introductory Statement of *Gaudium et spes*. It met ten times during the third session with Bishop Mark Mcgrath as the president and Canons Houtart and Moeller as secretaries. TEXT 3 under the title *De ecclesia in mundo huius temporis* was subjected to the conciliar debates between October 20 and November 10.

4. TEXT 4 was composed from January 31 to September 14, 1965, the first draft in Ariccia, the second in Rome but without reference to any prior draft, followed by successive revisions and meetings of the Mixed Commission. In the editorial committee happening in Rome, Paris and Louvain between April 9 to May 5, the text was criticised for being *nimis sociologicum* (too sociological) and *nimis optimisticum* (too optimistic) and for having too European outlook. After several revisions, TEXT 4 with the title of *Schema XIII: Constitutio pastoralis De ecclesia in mundo huius temporis* was ready by the end of April. After the Proemium (Articles 1-3), it contained and Introduction (Articles 4-9), a first main section, *De ecclesia et conditione humana* (Articles 10-58), a second main section, *De quibusdam problematis urgentioribus* (Articles 59-103) and a conclusion. The opening words were not *Gaudium et luctus* and *Gaudium et spes* arranged by regrouping the first four words into two pairs, one expressing joy and Christians hope, the other grief and anxieties of the modern man. In
the Introduction, the biblical sense of the phraseology «signs of the times» was removed completely and with it the concept of «the voice of time is the voice of God». From May 5 on, the schema was translated into modern languages, approved on September 14 and became the subject of study of different episcopal conferences during the summer, and finally presented and debated at the Council on the Fourth Session, from September 21 to October 8, 1965.

5) Commentaries of the Conciliar Fathers on the Phraseology.

«Signs of the Times». Cardinal Garrone presented the schema 13 Constitutio pastoralis de Ecclesia in mundo huius temporis, and Bishop Mark Mc Grath, the Relatio pro «expositione introductiva» (Introductory Statement). Among others, the following direct interventions of the Council Fathers on the phraseology are noteworthy:

A. Conciliares linguae Germanicae et Scandinavæ: «Signorum temporum» habeatur et sensu theologicæ clarior et, materiam quod attinet, respectu totius mundi habito, propositus. By this comment, the theological import of the «signs of the times» is recognized.

B. Cardinal Leger: In schemata opportune manifestatur cura procedendi a realitate mundi hodierni. Etenim «signa temporum» nostrae considerationi proponuntur non tantum ut homines eorumque necessitates melius cognoscantur, sed etiam ut per illa signa ipsius Dei vox et voluntas detegantur.

Cardenal Leger goes back to the discovery of the historicity of the signs of the times, that is, the discovery of the voice of God in history and in nature.

C. Bishop G. Andreas Beck of Liverpool stated that the notion «signs of the times» carries a prophetic sense and that the Church needs «concretization», meaning, the penetration of the concrete and real problems of man today. Notio «signa temporis» quamdam ostantionem sapit et somnium propheticum prae se fert. Si decretum ita ad homines hodiernos obviam exierit, ab illis non legetur.

D. Bishop Sebastian Soares de Resende aptly said that as we traverse the course of time very close to the second millennium, a similar point in history —at the end of the first millennium—
when people tragically and pessimistically prophetized, the task to scrutinize the signs of the times ought to be exercised with maximum objectivity and without perceived tragic ideas like those «prophets of doom». Ergo officium illiud perscrutandi signa temporum semper exercendum est maxima cum objetivitate.

E. Bishop Paul Gouyon recognized the reality of God speaking to man through events. Credimus tamen quod Deus homines ipsis eventibus ut signis (temporum) alloquitur. He added, however, that an event is certainly the voice of God if its nature and effects are good. «...Videtur eventus vocem Dei esse si natura sua et effectibus suis bonus est.» Today we hold, as a fundamental law of the theology of history that the individual event is always called as one with and representative of the whole of human history. History cannot be simply divided between salvations and disaster, between good effects and bad effects of events. Before God, humanity and its history form a single whole, for weal and for woe.

F. Bishop Rada Senosiain: Dialogue itaque cum mundo hodierno non potest haberi ut objectum huius solius schematis, sed totius Concilii, immo totius vitae Ecclesiae. In quolibet autem schemate parando, signa temporis prae oculis habere debemus, et problematibus hodiernis, vel saltem hodiernis formis problematum perennium, responsum Ecclesiae tradere. After concurring with the Church’s intention of a dialogue with the modern world not only as a matter of concern for the schema of the pastoral constitution, but also for the whole council, in fact, for the total life of the Church, he expressed his own understanding of the phraseology «signs of the times» as a actual question that necessitates a corresponding real answer from the Church.

5. The oral and written comments on the schema filled almost 500 large pages of single-spaced typescript. The revision resulted to TEXT 5. In the Introductory Statement the term signa temporum was used once and in the general sense adapted by the encyclical Pacem in terris. «Each chapter in Part II began with these signs and then proceeded to principles» On November 12, Bishop McGrath presented his second Relatio explaining why it is necessary for the Church to scrutinize the signs of the times and that the sense appropriated to the phraseology is not scriptural but general and historical according to John XXIII’s encyclical.
He added that TEXT 5’s methodology is descriptive and its purpose is dialogue, emphasizing man’s influence on his own historical situation, thus avoiding every kind of determinism. Article 4 of the Introductory Statement reads:

Ad tale munus exsequendum, omni tempore/Ecclesiae officium incumbit signa temporum perscrutandi et sub Evangelii luce interpretandi...(A).

Note A points to the revision in response to the comment of Francis Cardinal König (Germany) who underlined two pointers in his discourse, namely: that it is always incumbent for the Church to diagnose the signs of the times, and that each day it is necessary to exert new effort to discern them. *Necessitatem pro Ecclesia signa temporum semper dignoscendi... et in dies novum conatum necessarium esse ad hoc prae sentatum*. The last revision on the basis of the *modi* altered the text minimally.

6. With all the amendments, the preface and Introductory Statement were finally accepted by the Council on December 4, 1965. Out of 2230 votes there were 2153 *placet*, 7 *non placet*, 1 *juxta modum*, and 4 invalid votes. The phraseology *signa temporum* appeared only once in the final version (TEXT 6), associated with the idea that it is a function (*munus*) of the Church to scrutinize them (*officium perscrutandi*). Canon Charles Moeller in his work *History of the Pastoral Constitution* rightly remarks that «since what St. Paul says (1 Corinthians 2:15) applies to the Church in the Holy Spirit, it has the gift of ‘discernment’ of the Christian meaning of events. Thus it has some share in the prophetic office.» It can now be said that John XXIII is indeed «the Pontiff of aggiornamento and the Doctor of the signs of the times», as justly attributed by Marie-Dominique Chenu, because of his singular contribution to the Church’s decision to engage into dialogue with the world by a unique process: *signa temporum perscrutandi et sub Evangelii luce interpretandi*.

6) *Henceforth, a part of the language of the Social Magisterium.*

The Congregation for Catholic Education felicitously applies the *officium perscrutandi* even to Pius XII, in the sense of diagno-
ing the principal events of his time. «Due to his sensitivity and intelligence in grasping the ‘signs of the times’, Pius XII can be considered the immediate precursor of Vatican Council II and the social teaching of the Popes who followed him» (Guideline for the Study and Teaching of the Social Doctrine of the Church, n° 22). It makes us understand that, even without using the technical phraseology signa temporum, the Church was actually reading the events (Geschichte) as signs of the times. Not every is a sign of the times, though. The dictum Vox temporum vox Dei of TEXT 3 calls to mind. However, the notion of the signs of the times, in the Catholic tradition, was born in the modern times simultaneously with the birth of aggiornamento ( puesta al día in Spanish, pagbubukas in Tagalog) which means a unique aperture or a special openness to an opportunity. Just as Gaudium et spes fully reflects the pastoral elan of Vatican II, the expression «the signs of the times» captures the freshness of the spirit of Gaudium et spes in spite of the criticism of being nimis sociologicum et nimis optimisticum. In the same token that a constitutio pastoralis is a novelty, so is the phraseology signa temporum something new in the official language of the social magisterium. Here, the author intends to provide a partial list of the social documents where the expression «signs of the times» appears, with a limit of a single representation from each type of the social magisterium (of the pope, council, sacred congregation, episcopal conference, etc.) starting from John XXIII (of happy memory) to John Paul II in chronological order of publication.

1. John XXIII, Humanae salutis, December 25, 1961:

In keeping with the advice of Christ the Lord who urged us to recognized the «signs...of the times», we can, in the midst of all the hideous clouds and darkness, perceive a number of things that seem to be omens protending a better day for the Church and for mankind. (Note: the phraseology is in quotation marks).

2. Cardinal Silva Enriquez, Papal Legate to the International Marian Congress, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic (Homilia, March 22, 1965):

La Iglesia y la jerarquía se encuentran constatamente ante perspectivas inesperadas. No es posible preverlo todo. La hora
de Dios es misteriosa, como lo fue para María. De aquí la necesidad de escudriñar los signos de los tiempos para discernir en ellos la hora de Dios.

(Note: This homily was delivered when the Third Session of the Council was in progress, when TEXT 4 was being revised).


To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. (Note: the expression has no quotation marks).


But, since the church lives in history, she ought to «scrutinize the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel». Sharing the noblest aspirations of men and suffering when she sees them not satisfied, she wishes to help them attain their full flowering, and that is why she offers men what she possesses as her characteristic attribute: a global vision of man and the human race.


In the light of the faith that we profess as believers, we are striving to discover God’s Plan in the «signs of the times». It is our interpretation that the aspirations and cries of Latin America are revealing the direction of the Divine Plan operating in the redeeming love of Christ, which is the basis for these aspirations within the consciousness of a brotherly and sisterly solidarity.


Scrubudrinar los signos de los tiempos para discernir en ellos la hora de Dios.

(Note: This homily was delivered when the Third Session of the Council was in progress, when TEXT 4 was being revised).
sharing aspirations and questionings of all those who want to build a more human world, we have listened to the Word of God that we might be converted to the fulfilling of the divine plan for the salvation of the world.\(^46\)

7. First Planning Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, Statement *Evangelization in Modern Day Asia* (Taipei, Taiwan, 1974), n° 5:

> We need to read the signs of the times and thereby assist in the promotion of human dignity and freedom.

8. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Libertatis nuntius*, August 6, 1984, n° 1:

> The powerful and almost irresistible aspiration that people have for liberation constitutes one of the principal signs of the times which the Church has to examine and interpret in the light of the Gospel.\(^47\)


> The preeminent role of the United States in an increasingly interdependent global economy is a central sign of our times. (Notes: 1. It is singular sign; 2. A footnote says this notion is taken from John XXIII, *Pacem in terris*, n°. 130-131)\(^48\)


> With regard to the content and themes once again set forth by the Encyclical, the following should be emphasized: the awareness of the duty of the Church, as «an expert in humanity» «to scrutinize the signs of the times and to interpret them in the light of the Gospel»; the awareness, equally profound, of her mission of service, a mission distinct form the function of the state, even when she is concerned with people’s concrete situation; the reference to the notorious inequalities in the situations of
those same people; the confirmation of the Council's teaching, a faithful echo of the centuries-old tradition of the Church regarding the «universal purpose of goods»; the appreciation of the cultural and the technical civilization which contribute to human liberation, without failing to recognize their limits; finally, on the most serious duty incumbent on the more development nations «to help the developing countries» 49.

11. Congregation for Catholic Education, Guideline for the Study and Teaching of the Social Doctrine of the Church, December 30, 1988 n° 8:

Ethical principles and guidelines cannot be put into practice without an adequate discernment that leads the entire Christian community and each one in particular to scrutinize «the signs of the times» and to interpret reality in the light of the evangelical message.

The historical sense of the signs of the times in the above inventory of social documents is one and the same: the present realities or human events as «text» ought to be read and interpreted in the light of the Gospel. It may be noted that the sense as interpreted by the Council remains invariably valid. But the signification or the realities it signifies vary through the course of time. Hence the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, in its evaluation of the effects and cogency of Vatican Council II after twenty years, admitted that signs of the times of today are «partially different» from those of the time of the Council, that the «anguish and anxieties of man having augmented» (Final Document). A synopsis of the Chronology of the development of the notion signa temporum may be represented as follows: (observing that Humanae salutis, Apostolicam actuositatem, Sacrosanctum concilium and the 1985 Synod's Final Report are not social documents per se; and Redemptor hominis is partly social).
THE CHRONOLOGICAL HIGHLIGHTS
OF THE APPARITIO OF THE PHRASEOLOGY
SIGNA TEMPORUM IN THE SOCIAL DOCUMENTS
OF THE MAGISTERIUM

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<td>1961</td>
<td>John XXIII</td>
<td>Humanae salutis</td>
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<td>1961</td>
<td>John XXIII</td>
<td>Gaudium et spes, no. 4</td>
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<td>1961</td>
<td>John XXIII</td>
<td>Apostolicam Actuositatem, no. 14</td>
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<td>1961</td>
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<td>1962</td>
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<td>TEXT 3, Art.2: Ecclesia perscrutatur «signa temporum»</td>
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II. THE THEORETICAL DIMENSION OF THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

From the historico-textual evolution of the phraseology we can now proceed to the theoretical dimension of the signs of the times. Because the text must be read and its meaning be evaluated in its proper context, we follow the same pattern of treating the theoretical content of the context first, that is, the anthropologico-cosmological substance of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* before moving farther to the treatise of the theoretical content of the text which basically consists of the sociological. It may be appropriate to reveal that the permanent elements of the social doctrine of the Church — *Gaudium et spes* is a conciliar social doctrine— are derived from the anthropologico-cosmological content and the contingent elements of the social doctrine are taken from the theoretical content of the text *signa temporum*. This complex epistemological approach may be represented in the following diagram:

![Diagram 5](image)

1) *The theoretical content of the context*

*Agere sequitur esse.* The action of the Church must correspond to its nature. She —whose essence is «both human and divine, visible yet invisibly endowed, eager to act and yet devoted to contemplation, present in this world and yet not at home in it» — has decided, in his spirit of *aggiornamento*, to allow the event of the new Pentecost to happen by renewing her position vis-a-vis the *saeculum*, becoming more spontaneous and less formalistic, less pyramidal and regalistic yet remaining authentically biblical, evangelical and patristic, a true mystery, «a mystic reality, steeped in the presence of God».

The ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC and APOSTOLIC CHURCH, in recognition of the
kairos, has decided to enter into dialogue with the world—in Vatican Council II. In this dialogue, a dual extremity is being avoided, to wit: «constantism» and the passive presence of the Church in the world. Constantism is defined as «the attempt of any kind of power—social, economic or political—to take possession of the influential title of ‘Christian’. Constantism wants to involve the Church in the technical responsibilities of social engineering, with the aim if finding protection behind the prestige of its name». The other extreme is the passive presence of the Church in the world in the name of transcendence, «we are not of this world», and eschatology Schema 13, however, is very lucid in its doctrine: «The Church... teaches that eschatological hopes does not diminish the importance of earthly involvement, but even gives new support for its realization». And again: «...We are witnesses to the birth of a new humanism in which man is defined, above all, by his responsibilities towards his brothers and history». In short, the church is neither a part of the temporal mechanism constructing the new world order (it is admittedly and decisively autonomous) which belongs to the domain of the state; nor the Church merely an inert bystander in the arena of the human life struggles.

«The Pastoral Constitution *De Ecclesia in Mundo Huius Temporis* is made up of two parts; yet it constitutes an organic unity... In the first part (doctrinal), the Church develops her teaching on man, on the world which is the enveloping context of man’s existence, and on man’s relations to his fellow men*. This theoretical content of the particular context of the notion *signa temporum* could be divided into two part, namely: the theology of the world or Christian Cosmology, and the theology of man or Christian Anthropology. And in the same manner, we divide the present chapter.

2) **Christian Cosmology**

1. **Linguistic consideration.** The English word «world»—*mundo* in Spanish, *daigdig* in Tagalog, *cosmos* in Greek—is comprehensible in a multiple acceptations of meaning. We can reduce these into three basic acceptations: (1) the world as the totality of external realities characterized by order; it reflects the Latin con-
notation *saeculum*, (2) the world as present vis-a-vis the future world, and (3) the world as one of the three lifetime enemies of man’s spiritual battle. The Greek word *cosmos* originally means order, and for the Greeks the most important science is not anthropology but cosmology.

2. *From the Greek cosmos to the Christian «world».* The world, in its negative aspect, is immanent and does not possess any innate perfection. Positively though, the world reflects the goodness of God. It continuously talks about God, so to speak. It is impossible for any rational creature to contemplate the beauty or order of the world without at the end recognizing its Creator. God, the divine Author of all realities—earthly and otherwise—has the capacity to communicate His eternal goodness (*capax Dei*). *Bonum diffusivum sui*, hence the goodness of God in all things but not divinization of the world or what is called pantheism in philosophy. Man has, on the other hand, the capacity to discover this goodness (*capax homini*), yet his qualification is not total nor unlimited because, while the world is plainly immanent, God is transcendent. Man necessarily needs the Divine initiative to reveal Himself, or at least a sign of His presence. Meanwhile, man—who is essentially being-in-the-world—always considers it as the «world of man».

3. *Christology and Cosmology. Gaudium et spes*, Article 38, tees off with an extremely important biblical statement: «For God’s Word, through whom all things were made, was himself made flesh and dwelt on the earth of men (Jn.1; 3,14). Thus he entered the world’s history as a perfect man, taking that history up into himself and summarizing it (Eph. 1:10)» Jesus, *Verbo caro factum est*, took the whole humanity and the whole cosmos, that is all realities with all its constitutive elements: essence, externalities, values, deficiencies, historical dimension, transcendental and immanent qualities. This is precisely the ontological-theological point of contact that makes it possible for Christ’s paschal mystery (life, passion, death and resurrection) to become the unique event which saves the world. This view of human history and the cosmos in the perspective of the Plan of Salvation is what is meant by Christian cosmology. The Church, according to Karl Rahner, «will need to be related to Christ the Cru-
cified and Risen, in whose person there is the ultimate, victorious and irreversible promise of God historically manifested to the world»  

With regards to the «Christianization» of the whole universe or cosmos, it is imperative to clarify two things, namely: (1) The totality of all realities, matter and spirit, is renewed in Christ. «Particular importance was attached to establishing that not only man but the whole cosmos has received a new ontological dignity. One Council father, it is true, held that only the spiritual creature can be raised to the supernatural order, even though the whole creation is extrinsically referred and oriented to Christ, tota creatio extrinsice ordinetur ad Christum. Most of the fathers, however, emphasized that by reason of the essential connection of the cosmos with man as the created centre of its meaning, all creatures are raised to a new dignity in him... Only if earthly values are subjected to theological consideration is it possible to overcome the «false dualism between a merely natural order and the supernatural goal» Consequently they demanded the elaboration of a «Christian cosmology», in which «the incorporation into Christ does not appear to be an alienation from the world but is shown to ennoble secular values»  

(2) The second clarification is the Council’s position which is beyond any system or theory like Teilhardism. In article 38 of Gaudium et spes, the word assumens was struck out on the ground that Ephesians 1:10 does not mention assumptio but only recapitulatio, and the idea of «cosmic incarnation» along the Teilhardist tradition is theologically disputable. «Any confusion of Schema 13 with Teilhardism is impossible»  

Jesus Verbum caro factum est, has inaugurated the Kingdom of God as the Kingdom’s personification by his word and deed. Jesus «historified» the Kingdom of God and made it present. However, the Kingdom of God is also an eschatological reality and therefore, it is a «not yet» event. The Christ-event is not only the starting point of the realization of the promise of a transformation of the whole cosmos, that is, in the eschatological sense. Yves Congar makes this invaluable remarks: 

Christ fulfilled this promise, eschatologically, it is true, but the end of the ages has already begun, for the foundation of the restoration of all things has already been laid in Jesus Christ.
The Church, *sacramentum Christi*, is the presence of the Kingdom in history insofar as the risen Christ is present in the community of the faithful. She is not, nevertheless, identified with the Kingdom, insofar as the Kingdom of God necessitates to be realized eschatologically in the cosmic and universal level. Mother the Church then is in a «historical anticipation». The next question is this: How is the Church in historical anticipation related to the eschatological Kingdom? Or better put: «Certainly by Easter, Christ renewed everything. Does the activity of the Church in the world therefore consist purely and simply in preparing the transformation of the cosmos by spreading the grace of Easter throughout the world, in virtue of Pentecost, through preaching and the celebration of sacraments?». The eminent theologian answers his own question:

But it goes beyond the purely transfiguring activity of celebrating the sacred mysteries and the life of Christian asceticism; it already in fact does so in Chapters I-III of Part I (of *Gaudium et spes* ). It obliges men to action and even to a program of action...This fact (restoration of all realities in Christ) imposes on Christians the duty of working in the world to establish an order in harmony with the gift of truth and grace which they have received in Jesus Christ 66.

The concreteness of the Church’s task was spoused by Cardinals Leger (who «wanted greater realism»), Dopfner, and Meyer (whose intervention was regarded as one of the most significant in expressing the theological aim of the schema) as early as the October 20 to November 10, 1964 conciliar debates. The following is an extract of Cardinal Meyer’s speech:

The community of redemption forms the link between the Church and the world. God offers his glory to the whole man, body and soul, and to the whole created world. The Son has a cosmic mission because, as St. Paul says, it has pleased the Father to reconcile all things in his Son. This work is only completed at the end of time (eschatology) by the resurrection of the body and the mysterious transformation of the world. There will be, Scriptures tell us, a new heaven and an new earth. This
transformation actually begins with men’s work in the world. That work is consequently not merely something profane. Similarly, the course of the world’s history is not purely contingent but corresponds to a redemptive plan on the part of God.

The function of the Church comprises everything and all human things. As a consequence the «Church must not be restricted to a «religious» domain, identical with public worship... Like Jesus Christ, the Church is not content merely to reveal or announce the saving truth, but carries it into effect in action...The Constitution stress collaboration with other Christians and with all men of goodwill. Agere sequitur esse. The action of the Church ought to correspond to her nature: a sacramentum, a visible sign that makes present that which is invisible, the concrete tool that actualizes the Spirit. As Karl Rahner rightly formulates it: The Church «understands itself as the sacrament of hope for the world, as the place, the sign, and the tool of the Spirit of Jesus Christ who, according to the fourth Gospel, tells us what is to come».

4. The Church’s Dialogue with the World. The Church’s fear of infection or contamination from the world —the saeculum— is an erstwhile ecclesial history. The People of God now «infects the world with Christ» instead, in the words of the John XXIII. The Apostolic Constitution Humanae salutis of December 25, 1961 that solemnly convoked the Council started it all to happen: «It is a question of bringing the modern world with the vivifying and perennial energies of the Gospel». At the opening of the Council on October 11, 1962, John XXIII brought up the idea of the Church’s ad extra relation with the world. This intention to dialogue with the world was not just a matter of concern for the famous schema 13 but also for the whole council, in fact, for the total life of the Church, the conciliar fathers were advocating. Paul VI, encouraging the realization of the idea, writes in Ecclesiam suam on August 6, 1964: «Since the world cannot be saved from the outside, we must first of all identify ourselves with those to whom we would bring the Christian message— like the Word of God who Himself became a man» (n° 87). And finally, the Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et spes, promulgated on December 7, 1965 «ad gloriam Dei», states:
The Council focuses the attention on the world of men, the whole human family along with the sum of those realities in the midst of which it lives; that world which is the theatre of man’s history, and the heir of his energies, his tragedies and his triumphs’ that world which the Christian sees a created and sustained by its Maker’s love, fallen indeed into the bondage of sin, yet emancipated now by Christ, who was crucified and rose again to break the stranglehold of personified evil, so that the world might be fashioned anew according to God’s design and reach its fulfillment.  

Dialogue involves two conditions, to wit: there must be two partners with certain difference, and they must also have a minimum of similarity or point of agreement. The world is the profane, the *saeculum*; while the Church is the holy, but not the «absolute other». Both are autonomous and independent. Yet the point of contact is the Christ-event. The world is now seen as the theatre of human history where God’s saving plan is being realized. Not only man but the whole cosmos has received a new ontological dignity. Thus, «the whole world is not only the means by which redeemed man perfects himself, but is itself the object of redemption»  

The cosmos and human history is understood by the Christian cosmology is comprehensible only through faith. What is understandable to human reason is the «cosmological» status of man, that the contingent aspect of the cosmos is shared by man. Man-in-the-world, a part of the natural cosmos, is necessarily contingent, and subject to generation and corruption. Therefore in order to dialogue, the Church and the world need to speak the same language comprehensible to both. And the Church, since Vatican II, «has the honest wish to combine the light of revelation with universal human knowledge and experience, *lumen revelationis cum omnium peritia conjungere*. That is not a claim to a monologue of proclamation, but the spirit of dialogue which Paul VI evoked so strikingly in his encyclical *Ecclesiam suam*. The epistemological value lies in this: That the object determines the methodology, that theory ordains the type of praxis. Here we underscore the fact that the intention, decision and the realization of the Church to engage in a dialogue with world has a logical repercussion on the method of her social
position, social mission\textsuperscript{77} and social doctrine. Let it be made clear that this posture does not, by no means, relegate to the background the primary mission of the proclamation on the Gospel\textsuperscript{78}.

3) \textit{Christian Anthropology}

The Pastoral Constitution's Preface is composed of a triple facet which can be deciphered as follows:

1. Anthropological facet: \textit{Mundum igitur hominum...}
2. Cosmological facet: \textit{Cum universitate rerum...}
3. Historical facet: \textit{Mundum, theatrum historiae generis humani.}

No.1 and no.2 indicate the theoretical content of the \textit{Gaudium et spes} (con-text), and no. 3 the theoretical content of the \textit{signa temporum} (text). The word \textit{theatrum} echoes the actual concrete situation reality of human life often caricaturely portrayed by man himself in history, the ancient Greeks, by the Middle Ages' orators and dramatists, and by the contemporary actors and «phantoms of the opera». \textit{Theatrum} —the world as a stage of comedy and tragedy— reveals the «joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age». Since \textit{theatrum} presupposes actors, the only way to proceed to be a dialogue between the Church and the world is to talk about man who is the common denominator. Yes Congar expounds:

What then is the basis of the relations between the Church and the world? The basis is man, the fact that Christianity concerns man and that the articles of faith affect him. The Church is inserted into history of men because it is formed of men (art.1); therefore the world is both the scene of human history and the realization of God's saving plan (art.2)...The Preface could therefore declare: «Hence the pivotal point of our whole presentation is man himself, whole and entire, body and soul, heart and conscience, mind and will» (art.3)\textsuperscript{79}.

The centrality of anthropology in the formation of the schema occupied a special place. In his presentation of the \textit{relatio
on October 20, 1964, Bishop Guano said: «In this central question of man which still remains of the greatest importance, all the human problems of our time converge.» And Archbishop Garrone expressed the same point of view: «This is the real soul of the schema.» In this section it may be well to provide a conspectus of Christian anthropology as a theoretical content of the famous schema.

1. **Christian anthropology versus Marxist Anthropology.** Joseph Ratzinger, in his commentary on Vatican II, informs us that the Council’s attention was engaged by the debates on the rejection of Marxist atheism, Marxist anthropology or humanism and communism. He adds: «It is no less clear, however, that in addition it must reflect on its own share in the whole question of Marxism and the defectiveness of its own, and so accept the comprehensive question represented by Marxism as also concerning the Church itself. That the Church in Council decided on this step is the real drama behind Article 20 (of *Gaudium et Spes*), and makes it stand out like a milestone in the Church history of our century.»

Three aspects of Marxist anthropology are decidedly confronted, namely: (1) Marxist conception of *homo faber*, (2) collective one classist sense of man and (3) the building of a world without God. «Here (in no. 3) existentialism and Marxism are played off against one another, not without skill. The existentialists’ desire to free man from God in order to make him really free at last finds its corrective in Marxism, in which liberation from God is carried through rigourously, and precisely thereby the individual human being becomes a mere function of the collectivity.» In *Gaudium et spes*, this defective anthropology of Marxism is reconstructed by a Christian theory of man grounded on the biblical and magisterial teaching of the Church. Article 33 «mentions two facts, first the emergence of *homo faber*, in other words, man who by the application of scientific thought and technical skill has extended and is perpetually extending 'his mastery over almost the whole of nature' Secondly there is the fact of 'socialization', by which 'the human family is gradually establishing itself as a world-wide community' and at the same time is becoming conscious of itself as such. These two facts imply... two important intellectual developments, the formation of a dynamic view of the world and the experience of man’s temporal, historic character.»
A synopsis of the conceptualization of homo faber and socialization in Christian anthropology can be found in the Preface: Eiusque industria, cladibus ac victoriis signatum, indicating the age-old collective human endeavor in history—characterized by defeats and victories—to make the world better.

2. Christocentricity or Anthropology. The Preface continues, describing man: Ex amore creatoris conditum et conservatum (the fundamental dogma of creation), sub peccati quidem servitute positum...sed a Christo crucifixo et resurgente. Christian anthropology is equally characterized by two diacritics: (1) man's historicity and corporeality, his intrinsic situation in the world and his social conditionality, and (2) by this nature—anima spiritualis et immortalis—man is centred outside himself but in God. Man is corpore et anima unus (art. 14)\(^86\). This puzzle is solved on the initiative of God. The two distinctive properties of man met in Jesus Christ not by juxtaposition without connection but by virtue of the Incarnation\(^87\).

Ratzinger recalls the event leading to the formulation of chapter 1 of the Pastoral Constitution under the title, «The Dignity of the Human Person» that obviously speaks of the Christocentricity of man: On October 20, 1964, Cardinal Silva Enriquez of Santiago, Chile, «pointed out the humanist character of modern atheism, which cannot be met by a mere condemnation but can only be given a Christian answer in terms of Christ as the new man. True Christian anthropology lies in the mystery of Christ, 'which is not only the epiphany of God but also the epiphany of man in his plenitude'»\(^88\) (underscoring added).

4) Principles and Values: Permanent Elements of the Social Doctrine

From the theoretical content, Christian cosmology and anthropology of Gaudium et spes (con-text), the permanent elements of the social doctrine of the Church are deduced. The Guideline for the Study and Teaching of the Social Doctrine of the Church itemizes the fundamental and derived principles and values which are the permanent elements of the social teaching\(^89\). The fundamental principles are as follows:

1. The dignity of the human person is «the primary principle and the heart and soul of the social teaching of the Church»\(^90\).
This principle is based on the fact the man is created in the image and likeness of God, elevated to a supernatural destiny, redeemed by the precious blood of our Lord. Article 19 of the Pastoral Constitution commences with the same opening words of the Declaration on Religious Freedom: «Dignitatis humanae.».

2. Human rights flow by an intrinsic logic from the same dignity of the human. «The Church, by virtue of the Gospel committed to her, proclaims the rights of man; she acknowledges and greatly esteems the dynamic movements of today by which these rights are everywhere fostered,» declares Gaudium et spes. The Guideline writes though that the «encyclical Pacem in terris by John XXIII was the first official papal text explicitly dedicated to human rights. In fact, in reading the 'signs of the times', the Church perceived the need to proclaim the 'universal, inviolable and inalienable rights' of all men, against any discrimination and particularist conceptions. For this reason Mother the Church cannot remain silent when the rights of men are transgressed or endangered.

3. Human sociality is the innate need and connatural inclination to communicate with others by virtue of the social nature of man. «Man’s social nature makes it evident that the progress of the human person and the advance of society itself hinge on one another. For the beginning, the subject and the goal of all social institutions is and must be the human person, which for its part and by its very nature stands completely in need of social life» (Gaudium et spes, no. 25).

From the dignity, rights and sociality of the human person, the other permanent principles for reflection which guide and govern social life are derived’ thus they are called derived principles.

4. The common good is described as «all those social conditions which favor the full development of human personality» (Mater et Magistra). Article 26 of Gaudium et spes subtitled «Promoting the Common Good» explains that «today, (the common good) takes on an increasingly universal complexity and involves rights and duties with respect to the whole human race. Every social group must take account of the needs and legitimate aspirations of other groups, and even of the general welfare of the entire human family». The Church considers the common good as a
value in the service and organization of social life and of the new order of human coexistence.

5. Solidarity and subsidiarity are two substantial axioms governing social life. According to the principle of solidarity, each person—as a member of society itself and, by dint of the Gospel, to the destiny of all men's salvation Subsidiarity, as the complement of solidarity, protects the human person, local communities and «intermediary bodies» from the danger of losing their legitimate autonomy.

6. Participation occupies a predominant place in recent developments of the social teaching of the Church. This principle enforces and ensures the fulfillment of the ethical requirements of social justice.

7. The universal destiny of the good of the earth is the «characteristic principle of Christian social concern». Gaudium et spes solemnly teaches that «God intended the earth an all that it contains for the use of every human being and people. Thus, as all men follow justice and unite in charity, created goods should abound for them on a reasonable basis». Commenting on this Article, Oswald von Nell-Breuning observes that this principle powerfully underlines the Thomistic distinction between usus communis and administratio et dispensatio particularis in Summa Theologiae II-II, q. 66. According to von Nell-Breuning, the usus communis is prior to any property rights. It gave birth to the «social character» of property, transparent in Pius XI's doctrine of the two aspects of property, indoles individualis et socialis in Quadragesimo anno, articles 45 and 49. John Paul II explains in his encyclical Laborem exercens, «Christian tradition has never upheld this right as absolute and untouchable. On the contrary, it was always understood this right within the broader context of the right common to all to use the goods of the whole creation; the right to private property is subordinated to the right to common use, to the fact that goods are meant for everyone».

The fundamental and derived principles for reflection of the Church's social doctrine, as permanent and necessary laws «that are always valid» governing social life, are not independent from the genuine recognition of the fundamental values inherent in the dignity of the human person. These values are principally: truth, freedom, justice, solidarity, peace and charity or Christian love.
The vital importance of these values explains why it is imperative for the Church to propose them so insistently as true foundations of a new society and a new world order more worthy of man.  

5) *The theoretical content of the text: A theology of the signs of the times.*

From the treatise on the anthropologico-cosmological substance of the Pastoral Constitution *De Ecclesia in mundo huius temporis* from where the permanent elements of the social doctrine are derived, it is imperative to deal with the theoretical content of the signs of the times, a contingent element. That which is immutable in social matters ought to be distinguished from what is mutable. The social doctrine of the Church is constituted of «certain moral principles which are unconditional and the ‘signs of the times’, that is, those changing (contingent) institutions of each time and place».

Marie-Dominique Chenu names it as a *locus theologicus* on the perspective of the consciousness of the Church to find the presence and message of God in the historical realities, while Bernard Haring calls it a theological «point of departure» and Luis Sarries christens the signs of the times as «The Great Awakening» (*El gran despertar*) . Paul VI, in his address to some Observers of the Council on October 17, 1963, did mention of an emerging theology that is «concrete and historical» which deserved to be studied profoundly. Pursuing his interest on this emerging subject, His Holiness delivered a unique discourse on the theology of the signs of the times in 1969. It all started with the Article 4 of *Gaudium et spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World which, according to Bishop Aloysius Wycislo et al, has «provided the Church with a theology of the ‘signs of the times’». Since the Vatican Council II, theologians and the people can properly speak, J. M, Aubert does, of the conciliar doctrine of the signs of the times.

Here we intend to develop a discourse on the signs of the times insofar as it is related to the methodological process of the social doctrine of the Church for this is precisely the *status questions* of the dissertation. This treatise demands a division into a
tripartite level of comprehension, that is, *signa temporum* on the level of theological content. The three level will be subjected to following type of analysis, namely: linguistic, socio-historical and theological. This perspective is understandable with the help of the following diagram:

**PART II**

- *signa temporum* — *level of TEXT*
- *type of analysis* — *linguistic (semiotic)*

**PART III**

- *method (social doctrine)*
- *level of EVENT* — *socio-historical*
- *level of MESSAGE* — *theological*

Diagram 7

**a) A linguistic analysis of the signs of the times as text**

Language, text (oral or written), and events are human signs that unavoidably calls for rational analysis and interpretations. The linguistic analysis is called semiotic. Though this is not the place for *ex professo* linguistic analysis, we deem it obligatory to provide a sketch of a semiotic of the text *signa temporum* by characterizing the phraseology itself. The following are the linguistic properties of the text *signa temporum*:

1. The phraseology is a finished and structured text written with a specific context or «horizon of understanding» (in the words of J. Severino Croatto). It sprung though from an event or series of events. Hence the «profound changes» of humanity prior to Vatican II were capsulized, so to speak, in a phraseology *signa temporum*.

2. The signs of the times is not a «closed text» which means a relic of the Gospel of Matthew or a dead phrase of the Pastoral constitution, nor is it a «deactualized text», that is, a text no longer speaking to the present. It is a book in itself, a polysemy, that is open to many readings and interpretations. Matthew’s *signa temporum* has an eschatological meaning, *Humanae salutis*’ biblical
meaning and *Gaudium et spes* signs of the times has a general and historical meaning according to the sense given by *Pacem in Terris*. The original «horizon of understanding» of Matthew and of *Humanae salutis* disappear in *Gaudium et spes*.

3. Every text is also a sign. The phraseology signs of the times is a sign reality (signifier) that contains a signified reality (significate). Moreover the signs of the times is a language-event (*Sprachereignis* in German) or a word-event (*Wortereignis*)

4. Intralinguistic pertains to the inherent meaning of the text. Now the phraseology *signa temporum*, besides being an intralinguistic, is constituted by a referent, that is an extralinguistic reality to which the phraseology refers *Darash*, an analysis that explores the deep and hidden meaning, is necessitated by the extralinguistic reality of *signa temporum*; *pashat*, a rabbinical term for the immediate and surface meaning of a text, is considered useful only for the intralinguistic reality of the phraseology. *Darash* and *pashat* belonged to the Aramaic terminology during the time of Philo of Alexandria in the first century B.C.

This semiotic may be represented in the following diagram:

Diagram 8

`From Semiotic to Epistemology. Signs may be representative or indicative. A sign is representative or symbolic in the same manner as an ambassador is representative of his government, albeit possessing in himself an authority. On the other hand, an indicative sign, bearing no particular value, points to something else beyond and different from itself. It «appears» for another, hence a «phenomenon». The term «phenomenology» or the doctrine of appearances was apparently first used by J. H. Lambert as a title of Part 4 of his *Neues Organon* in 1764.`
Signa temporum is a type of an indicative sign and therefore a phenomenon. It has no epistemological value of its own. No knowledge could be extracted culled from it. Signa temporum’s function is not for comprehension of truth itself. It exists as a mere «signpost» that leads thinking into phenomenology or empiricism. Empiricism, as a form of science, takes sensible experience as the true knowledge. In the Middle Ages in Europe, sensible knowledge —duly tested— became more and more a court of appeal to check the verdicts of metaphysics and theology; as a consequence, for instance, Frederick II was daring in saying: «fides enim certa non provenit ex auditu» 115.

The present day ideologies and the sciences of psychology and sociology display an exaggerated respect to the empirical that goes well with the limitless possibility of physical sciences and technology in the modern sense. The Church and theology, nonetheless, cannot simply dismiss too quickly the positive role of the signs of the times. In the theological investigation, it is serviceable in two ways, namely: from the point of view of theory and from the point of view of praxis. The postulate «Start with the facts» —although it cannot be admitted as a theoretical principle— contains its own functional being or ens, the ens of a practical principle, with a vista to put into praxis the theory one holds.

In this sense, signa temporum can serve as a «point of departure», a genesis of cognition, a raw material for the theoretical practice of theology and for the pastoral strategy of the Church. It can prove itself as a method of great importance for theologians who «have their feet well enough planted on the ground, so to speak, of the actual phenomena of living faith, and will not dissolve it into an abstract transcendence. They can bring out the proper worldliness of faith without recourse to ideologies...The constitutive analysis brings out the meaning of the truth step by step from the de facto experience, «explains Karl Lehmann 116 Secondly, from the vista of praxis, signa temporum is a propitious «signpost» that calls for an examination, an event that demands a response. Any «profound study a concrete and historical theology» (in the words of Paul VI), or any scrutiny of the signs of the times has an immediate pastoral repercussion. To begin to read the signs of the times is to begin to act.
From Epistemology to Ontology. Because of the psychosomatic structure of man, corpus et anima unus (Gaudium et spe, n°14), his spirituality and corporeality in one, hence belonging to a definite grade of intelligibility, signs are essential to social life. Human communication cannot simply functions without signs. A sign is that which stands in place of another. We can name four categories of signs, to wit: natural, conventional or artificial, mixed and historical. Smoke is a natural sign of fire. The flag with blue, red, white colours and three stars forming a triangle in the middle of which is a sun in golden colour is the conventional sign of the Republic of the Philippines. A mixed sign could be the colour red which means blood and at the same time martyrdom. A historical sign is a human event the content of which refers to another reality. An example may be the unforgettable assassination of Senator Benigno Aquino on August 21, 1983 which was unanimously considered by the Filipinos as the beginning of the end of the Marcos dictatorship; when a fateful historical event turned to be a blessing in disguise.

The signs of the times, a Sprachereignis, is a kind of historical sign in the ontological order. In existentialism, it was Martin Heidegger who «moves from epistemology to ontology. The «being» he interrogates, Dasein, is a being-in, a being-in-the-world, a situated being. In this prospect, the signs of the times—a concrete event—is a situated being, a present reality just as man is a being-in-the-world; man is the causa efficiens of the signs of the times. Furthermore, as a sign, signa temporum is similar to the seven sacraments of the Church.

St. Thomas defines sacramentum as a sign of holy things in which that holy thing signified sanctifies man. Both are visible signs of an invisible presence of God. The difference, however, lies in this: sacramentum is the cause of grace in such wise as to actually effect what it proclaims, whereas signa temporum is an occasion of the presence of God, vox temporum vox Dei. An occasion, in contradistinction to the cause-effect relationship, signifies a momentous event, a significant opportunity, «a favorable time», a kairos. Finally, the signs of the times is constituted by a diacritic, to wit: diagnosis and prognosis. Because the present reality is taken as a «text», a language-event, a Sprachereignis, the signs of the times demands analysis or diagnosis.
from the Greek words *dia* meaning «through» or «by» and *gnosis* which means «knowledge», is synonymous to an analysis, an examination, a discernment, a scrutiny, etc. On the other hand, an appropriate judgment and action logically follow an analysis of the signs of the times. *Signa temporum* therefore invites a prognosis, a Greek word which means a foretelling, a prediction. In this latter sense, it may be said that to read the signs of the times is prophetic. On the other hand, an appropriate judgment and action logically follow an analysis of the signs of the times. *Signa temporum* therefore invites a prognosis, a Greek word which means a foretelling, a prediction. In this latter sense, it may be said that to read the signs of the times is prophetic. On this touchstone, «the prophet is more realistic than a doctor, for he reads in the history. He examines the signs of the times on top of the (abstract) principles», Marie-Dominique Chenu affirms. One may rightly claim therefore that the signs of the times, in addition to the function of indicating or «appearing» for something, can lead a direction, that is, the signs of the times, more than a «signpost», is a «guidepost» for the Church.

b) *The event as «text»*

We now proceed, continuing the treatment of its theoretical dimension, towards a theology of the signs of the times within the context of *Gaudium et spes*. The diagram that follows will assist us to situate our present discourse:

```
level of theory 1 event as TEXT
E. officium incumbit signa temporum perscrutandi et sub Evangelii luce interpretandi

level of praxis 2 TASK OF THE CHURCH

3 socio-analytical meditation 4 hermeneutical mediation
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*Diagram 9*
This section therefore seeks to articulate nos. 1 and 2 in the conciliar context, while nos. 3 and 4 shall be treated in the general context of the methodology of the social doctrine of the Church in Part III.

Here we shall attempt to construct a theology of the signs of the times in its historical sense, the sense proposed by the Council. When *signa temporum* appeared in *Humanae salutis* (1961), its first emergence in a papal document, John XXIII directly quoted the phrase from Matthew 16:4. Later Paul VI, in his discourse on the subject in 1969, would acknowledge that *signa temporum* in *Humanae salutis* carries a «remote evangelical reminiscence», that is, Jesus in the Gospel alluded to the prodigies, phenomena, or portents that indicated the arrival of the messianic hour. The Holy Father explained that the same expression today gained a new significance of great importance the meaning of which is «a foretelling of a better times for the Church and for the human race»; an optimistic and prophetic signification indeed. During the Third Session of the Council, TEXT 3 endeavored to make clear the theological basis of the Church’s undertaking to dialogue with the world by means of the concept of the «signs of the times» in its evangelical sense: *Vox temporum vox Dei*. The idea was sharply attacked. «To link the Roman proverb on time as the voice of God with Jesus’ eschatological warning against the blindness of his nation which, though on the lookout for signs, was not able to interpret him, God’s eschatological sign to that age... was considered not only exegetically unacceptable but of doubtful validity in itself». Christ, the authentic Self-Revelation of the Father, has spoken once for all in a «unique way». *Revelatio* in the strict sense has ended with the Apostolic Time; therefore, there could never be new revelations in history. With this, the Council has implicitly forbidden any contemporary application of the evangelical *signa temporum*.

Eventually the phrase in the final version was a revision and is constituted by a historical sense: in the events of the present time the Church has the function to detect indications of God’s presence. Human events are *signa praesentia Dei* (*Gaudium et spes*, no.11). In Articles 44, the signs of the times is not the visual indication but the auricular indication of the «Revealed Truth». The signs of the times are the «many voices of our age», it says.
Hence it is not only a sign to be read but a voice to be heard. Both expressions suit the psychosomatic structure of man *corpus et anima usus*, that belongs to a definite grade of intelligibility.

*Signa temporum* are truly visible and audible signs that indicates the invisible and inaudible presence of God. Accordingly Paul VI teaches that there exist two methods of discovering God’s Plan: (1) through an *a posteriori* recognition of God in the sacred history, and (2) through the scrutiny of the signs of the times, through the reading of the historical «text», that results consequently to a «theological interpretation of contemporary history»

The first corresponds to the deductive process of investigation while the second to the inductive method. The Holy Father goes farther to explain that, because the Kingdom of God is ordinarily inaccessible through the direct, experimental and intuitive mode, it is made present through human signs. Then logically historical events and the social realities «are signs of the times that bring some news of an immanent Providence and invites a possibility and exigency of an apostolic action».

Later the 1971 Synod of Bishops would testify that «scrutinizing the ‘signs of the times’ and seeking to detect the meaning of the emerging history, while at the same time sharing aspirations and questionings of all those who want to build a more human world» is to listen to the Word of God. And the «meaning of the emerging history» is the actual, not the past events; the concrete, not the abstract problems; the story of the real man-situated-in-the-world and not the «hypothetical superman»; however, all of these with Christ, through Him and in Him. In our aim to construct a theoretical framework of the present event as «text» or the concrete historical realities as the signs of the times, it may be well to divide this discourse into the following subtitles: (1) The elements of historical events, (2) transformation as a property of human events, (3) God’s presence in the Church and in history, and (4) the ecclesial task of reading the actual events as «texts».

*Elements of Historical Events.* Man is the protagonist; space, the *theatrum* where the drama occurs, is the world; and time not *chronos*, but *kairos*: these are the basic elements that comprise the phenomenon called the signs of the times. (1) The centrality of man is a must in all contemporary reflections on the signs of the
times. Although «true Christian anthropology lies in the mystery of Christ who is not only the epiphany of God but also the epiphany of man in his plenitude», the alpha, the causa efficiens and the omega of his own history is man who is affected by the profound changes of his own doing. God’s gift of grace and the created, fallen and redeemed nature are in constant struggle within man. In this central question of man, all the human problems of our time converge.\(^{130}\)

(2) The world as the space, the theatrum of real comedies and tragedies, where the gaudium et luctus, spes et angor hominum huius temporis are experienced through the course of time, is the second element of the signs of the times. Now, Christ entered the human history as a Man and renewed the world into Himself (cf. Ephesians 1:10). «Therefore the world is both the scene of human history and the realization of God’s saving Plan», argues Yves Congar.\(^{131}\) The world henceforth is understood no just as a setting, but «as a reality coming into being, not just space but as order»\(^{132}\).

(3) Time, an element of the signs of the times, need be apprehended in the sense of the phraseology vox temporum vox Dei. In Charles Moeller’s interpretation of this phrase, «time can be the bearer of a religious meaning, the place of Divine Revelation, of man’s approach to God or fall from Him» Time contains an inherent value that modifies man’s historicity, not mechanically but substantially. Profound transformations in man and in the world are occasioned by this single factor: time, taken in its being «now», in its kairological sense, in its urgency, in its actually, as a «favorable time». In fact, Cardinal Silva Enríquez calls it the «hour of God».\(^{133}\)

Man and his freedom\(^{134}\) (the protagonist) in the world (space) and in time characterised by transformation or profound changes are the human events that serves as a «text» for the Church to read and interpret in the light of the revealed truth. They are actual question that necessitates a corresponding real answer from the Church, Bishop Rada Senosiain aptly says\(^{135}\). These natural events, perceptible to reason, announces a secret supernatural message from the Divine which is only perceptible to faith.

The signs of the times, in order to remain effective «signs» or «voices» must possess the significative character of historical
events. It is not super-added but fully incarnated in the temporal reality. Historical sense means transcendence in immanence, therefore. And to read the historical events as «text» is not to spiritualize them nor to «abstractize» them which is tantamount to be inconsistent with their concrete and temporal reality. From this the historical sense of *signa temporum* that is given by the Pastoral Constitution vis-a-vis the biblical sense is made comprehensible. We can now differentiate *Gaudium et spes*’ signs of the times from that of *Humanae salutis*.

*Transformation as a Property of the Human Events.* The elements of man space and time are deficient to complete a correct understanding of the signs of the times without referring to its essential property: transformation or profound changes (from the Greek word *methamorphosis*), Paul VI refers to the «whirlwind of transformations of the contemporary world,* while *Gaudium et spes* speaks of them as «dramatic characteristics» of our time. In Articles 4, the Pastoral Constitution sketches the main features of this transformation:

Today, the human race is involved in a new stage of history. Profound and rapid changes are spreading by degrees around the world. Triggered by the intelligence and creative energies of man, these desires, both individual and collective, and upon his manner of thinking and acting with respect to things and to people. Hence we can already speak of a true cultural and social transformation, one which has repercussions on man’s religious life as well. As it happens in any crisis of growth, this transformation has brought serious difficulties in its wake.

Articles 5, more forms of *metamorphosis* are identified:

Today’s spiritual agitation and the changing conditions of life are part of a broader and deeper revolution...Technology is now transforming the face of the earth.

Thus is the general phenomenon, a characteristic mark of the present age that eventually affects the intimate aspirations and longings of man; a worldwide occasion of the extrinsic *metamor-
phosis causing intrinsic metamorphosis. Moeller explains that the changes in the past were slow and in a sense were not perceptible to the masses. Today, however, the whole human race is conscious of «radical changes»\textsuperscript{138}. These changes are «profound and rapid» crossing the threshold of the collective and individual sanctu­ry of man's rationality, with repercussions affecting his cultural, social intellectual and religious way of living.

With the elements (man, space and time) and the characteristic mark (transformation) given, it may be appropriate to recall the definition of the signs of the times as formulated by the \textit{Subcommissio de signis temporum}: those phenomena that, by its universality and frequency, characterize an age and express the needs and aspirations of the present humanity. These are changes that have consequences on the situation of man, his values, socialization, rationality and liberty\textsuperscript{139}. The signs of the times, the metamorphosis as such, may affect man for good or for bad. The phenomenon of perestroika, for instance, created a favorable opportunity for religious freedom in the mainland of U.S.S.R., and in Eastern Europe, leading to the fall of Berlin Wall, and eventually to the unity for the entire German people. Beyond doubt, the effects are good. On the other hand, the Gulf War—preceded by a decade of stockpile of arms in Iraq— is considered a singular phenomenon of the second half of the 20th century that shook the equilibrium of the world order in all its aspects: economic, diplomatic and international relations, religious and cultural, etc., causing dreadful sorrows and sufferings to millions of people, or even more.

Both phenomena are complex signs of the times that can serve as vehicles of the Divine Message and therefore merit an analysis and interpretation in the light of faith by the Church\textsuperscript{140}. We always hold, as a fundamental law of the theology of history, that the individual human event is part and parcel of the whole human history, that history cannot be simply divided between disaster and harmony, between bad effects and good effects of transformation. Before God, the human race and its history of to­day is a bundled totality with a bright or bleak tomorrow\textsuperscript{141}. Paul VI teaches that in those human realities or phenomena, sometimes «obscure» and «immoral», the Divine designs could be encountered. Hence, the Pope says, the church and concretely a
Christian—in experiencing disunity, injustice or war—is required to carry an apostolate of charity, to prepare the coming of the Kingdom of God in the «kingdom of men»\textsuperscript{142}.

**God’s Presence in the Church and in History.**

The representation below will function us as a point of reference:

\[ \text{God’s Presence} \quad \begin{array}{c}
\text{trascendence} \\
\text{Church} \\
\text{transcendence and inmanence} \\
\text{sing of the times} \\
\text{immanence}
\end{array} \quad = \text{CONTENT (level of faith)} \]

\[ \quad = \text{munus (to read and interpret)} \]

\[ \quad = \text{EVENT as «TEXT» (level of reason)} \]

**Diagram 10**

Bishop Mark McGrath, in his commentary on the title of the Pastoral Constitution *De Ecclesia in mundo huius temporis*, emphasizes that this document treats the Church in (coram) the modern world, not merely in the «modern» world of the recent centuries, but «in the actual world, the world which we live in the present moment»\textsuperscript{143}. Thus the conciliar Fathers worked hard to clarify the basis of this emphasis. Vatican Council II., while recognizing the *ad extra* vitality of the Church through her dialogue with the world, teaches her *ad extra* vitality, that is, the immanence and transcendence of the Church. The Church realizes that she is «truly and intimately linked with mankind and its history» (*Gaudium et spes*, n°1). In Articles 44, because of her immanent nature, the Church—the Sacrament of salvation to all nations—has to take flesh among every people:

From the beginning of her history, she has learned to express the message of Christ with the help and ideas and terminology of various peoples, and has tried to clarify it with the wisdom of philosophers, too. Her purpose has been to adapt the Gospel to the grasp of all as well as
to the needs of the learned, insofar as was appropriate... For
the ability to express Church's message in its own way is
developed in each nation, and at the same time there is
fostered a living exchange between the Church and the
diverse cultures of people.... With the help of the Holy
Spirit, it is the task of the entire People of God, especially
pastors and the theologians, to hear, distinguish and in-
terpret the many voices of our age, and to judge them in
the light of the Divine Word, so the Revealed Truth can
always be more deeply penetrated, better understood and
set forth to greater advantage (emphasis added).

Bishop Bonaventure Kloppenburg explains further that «be-
ing itself conditioned by history, the Church must undergo change
and must adapt itself to each generation, constantly scrutinizing the
signs of the times and knowing and understanding the world in
which it lives here and now» 144 The immanent Church, never-
theless, is also transcendent, that is, «she transcends all limits of
time and of race», declares Lumen gentium, n° 9 145 Reason: she is
the sacrament of salvation for all men and until the end of time.
By her transcendence, the presence of Christ must be manifested
in her immanence, in her incarnation in history. Joseph Ratzinger
offers a penetrating theological insights in the explanation of the
presence of Jesus in the Church through the Holy Spirit:

Certainly the Church is tied to what was once and for
all, the origin in Jesus of Nazareth, and in this sense it
is obliged «chronologically» to continuity with him and the
testimony of the beginning. But because 'the Lord is the
Spirit' (2 Cor. 2:13) and remains present through the Spirit,
the Church has not only the chronological line with its
obligation of continuity and identity, it has also the mo-
ment, the kairos, in which it must interpret and accomplish
the work of the Lord as present. The Church is not the
petrification of what once was, but its living presence in
every age. The Church's dimension is therefore the pre-
sent and the future no less than the past. Its obedience to
the Lord precisely as such must be obedience to him as
pneuma, as summons today; it must be accomplished with
discernment of spirits and must accept the risk of submit-
ting at all times to such discernment 146.
In the chronological time, Christ has revealed the Father and «has spoken once and for all in a unique way», and henceforth extending His presence in the Church in the ontological order of Salvation History. In the kairological time, the Spirit of the Lord is present in her and in human history too in the pneumatological order. All history is encompassed and determined by God, but not as a pantheistic evolution nor by the Teilhardist theory of «cosmic incarnation» but by «God’s free decision, the concretissimum universale of the Divine Plan of salvation, on which all history rests». The Supra-temporal and the Eternal, the Omnipresent God is immanent and lives in every instant of time. Therefore, the Church’s dialogue with the world and her qualification to discern the signs of the times is explicable in a single term: *immanence*. And by the same *immanence*, the actual signs of the times can serve as a «text» where the immanent Church can read and interpret the transcendent presence of God, in fact, His saving grace or, in the words of Paul VI, the «Plan of God».

However, the Church —being a visible sign of salvation and a sacrament of God’s presence herself— is comprehensible only by faith. What the universal rationality of man can acknowledge is the immanent Church, and only the Christian faith can recognize the transcendent Church. For this reason by the theological reflection of history and of herself, the Church, through the gift of faith, can discern the transcendent Presence of God in herself and history. By this, she becomes a competent interpreter of «God’s authentic presence» (*Gaudium et spes*, n° 11) in history, in the human events, in the signs of the times. For this reason, Bishop Paul Gouyon, during the Council, sates that the Church believes that God speaks to man through events. Paul VI, in *Populorum progressio*, n° 13, declares that, «since the Church lives in history, she ought to ‘scrutinize the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel.’»

In addition, the Latin American bishops, on the occasion of their second General Conference held in Medellin in 1968, announce with animation: «In the light of the Faith that we profess as believers, we are striving to discover God’s Plan in the ‘signs of the times’». And finally, her qualification to read the human events as «text», and to offer principles for reflection, criteria for
judgment and guidelines for action has won for the Church the title of «an expert in humanity» through the years. Thus, John Paul II, in his encyclical Sollicitudo rei socialis, n°7, puts an emphasis on «the awareness of the duty of the Church, as ‘an expert in humanity’, ‘to scrutinize the signs of the times and to interpret them in the light of the Gospel’».

c) The Ecclesial duty of reading the signs of the times.

As we have noted, the signs of the times has a double function, to wit: (1) as «signpost» it indicates or «appears» for the presence of God, and (2) as «guidepost» it can lead a direction for the Church. The first function demands a diagnosis and the second invites a prognosis.

During the conciliar debates on the schema 13 when the Fathers were underscoring the exigency of promoting a dialogue between the Church and the world, it has been construed that to «observe», to «listen» and to «read» the signs of the times is the appropriate approach for the Church to begin to fulfill her role in the temporal realities (Cardinal Leger), that the reflection and the interpretation of human events as signs of God’s presence is a moral duty for the Church (Bishop Andreas Beck), and that it is incumbent for the Church at all times but with maximum objectivity, to discern these human phenomena (Cardinal Konig and Bishop Soares de Resende). These interventions and the conciliar reflection on the actual reality of that time led to the formulation of that portion of Article 4 of Gaudium et spes which states:

To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel (underscoring added).

Charles Moeller comments that it is a function (munus) of the Church to read them (officium perscrutandi) and since what St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:15 applies to the Church in the Holy Spirit, the Church therefore has the gift of «discernment» of the Christian meaning of events. It is imperative then for us to
discover the theological and dialectical groundwork of this officium perscrutandi. Our focus of attention now is on the moral duty of the Church and its bass.

The Dialectical Basis of the Ecclesial Duty to Read the Signs of the Times.

1. Avoiding the dual dangers of «constantism» and an inert presence in the world, and casting away once and for all the fear of the world’s contamination, the People of God (Lumen gentium, n°9) has decided instead to «infect the world with Christ» and «with the vivifying and perennial energies of the Gospel» (John XXIII, Humanae salutis) by engaging herself to a dialogue with the world. To be incorporated into Christ, to-be-Christians-situated-in-the-world, does not result to an alienation from the same but, on the contrary, can ennoble secular values and temporal realities. Since her action and mission ought to correspond to her nature, the Church —the visible sign of the Kingdom of God, «the material of the celestial realm» (Gaudium et spes, n° 38), a sign of salvation— need not be restricted to the spiritual and «religious domain» (Yves Congar). But like the Lord Jesus, she must not be contented merely to announce the saving truth and values but ought to carry them into effect in action. The Church becomes them an instrument or a «tool of the Spirit of Jesus Christ» (Karl Rahner).

The Latin American bishops, assembled in Puebla in 1979 and following Paul VI (OA, no.4) has formulated their statement: «Attentive to the signs of the times, which are interpreted in the light of the Gospel and the Church’s magisterium, the whole Christian community is called upon to assume the responsibility for concrete options and their effective implementation» By this concrete mission, the Christian community —which is the subject of the task to read the signs of the times— actualizes the promise of a transformation of the whole cosmos in the eschatological sense, «so that the world might be fashioned a new according to God’s design and reach its fulfillment» (Gaudium et spes, no.2)

In short, the theological basis of the ecclesial duty to read the signs of the times is Christian cosmology, that is, the view of
the whole universe (the *cosmos*, the man and his history, all things human, the temporal and the spiritual, the secular and the sacred) by the Church from the perspective of the Plan of Salvation by Vatican Council II, through the Degree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam actuositatem*, no. 5, is exhorting us that the «mission of the Church is not only to bring men the message and grace of Christ, but also to penetrate the temporal sphere with the spirit of the Gospel»

2. Additionally, besides a theological groundwork, the ecclesial duty to read the signs of the times is founded on a pastoral bedrock. It has been explained before that the *officium perscrutandi signa temporum* is a prophetic task. «The gift of discernment of the Christian meaning of events... has some share in the prophetic office,» says Moeller. This prophetic office of the Church is not the foretelling of the future but the announcement of the good news, the universal principles for the integral well-being of man and the denunciation of injustice and transgression of human rights. Consequently, the Congregation for Catholic Education teaches that «in regarding the signs of the times, the Church perceived the need to proclaim the universal, inviolable and inalienable right of all men, against any discrimination and particularist conception». The Church, God’s *nabi* or spokesman, cannot remain silent in the presence of slavery, exploitation, injustice and manipulation. This prophetic mission is stressed in the Instruction of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Libertatis conscientia*, no. 63

Her teaching therefore extends to the whole moral order, and notably to justice which must regulate human relations. This is part of the preaching of the Gospel.

Logically it follows that this ecclesial mission with respect to social concern is a constitutive dimension of the announcement of the saving truth or what is known as evangelization. It may be recalled that in chapter 3 (on the social mission of Church), we have established the argument that her social mission (kingly office) is essentially linked (*substatiale vinculum*) with the mission of evangelization (prophetic office), and that the social mission of the Church is theologically and ontologically founded in the very social mission of the historical Christ. We may conclude therefore
that the ecclesial duty to read the signs of the times essentially belongs to the social mission of the Church. And lastly, it may be well to remember also that the social mission of the Church is the theologico-historical basis of her social doctrine.

...Et sub Evangelii luce interpretandi. The task to read the signs of the times is incomplete without the second constitutive element: to interpret them in the light of the Gospel. *Signa temporum* as such are human acts and events, and not ethical norms. By themselves, the signs of the times are incapable of giving us the norms of proper human and Christian conduct. If these events demand *diagnosis*, the only correct *diagnosis* is a Christian type of scrutiny and interpretation. They necessitate to be judged according to Christian ethic, in the light of faith, *sub luce Evangelii*. To proceed from the signifier (text) to the significate (events as «text») on the first level does not require faith. But to go from the signifier (event as «text») to the significate (theological meaning). On the second level of interpretation, faith is a criterion. 160

In interpreting the signs of the times and finding in them the Divine Plan, faith becomes a necessary element. That is why Charles Moeller associates this function to the biblical gift of «discernment». He applies this gift to distinguishing the permanent and contingent realities. According to him, «There is an essential task of the Church here, that of distinguishing realities which are really not subject to change from those which do change and must change. It also has to say how these immutable realities fit into the changing world» 161 Exactly, these immutable realities (the permanent elements of the social doctrine of the Church) are the norms by which to judge the signs of the times (contingent elements). Joseph Ratzinger observes that, in articles 11 of *Gaudium et spes* that speaks of the *praesentia Dei*, the word *animadvertere* was replaced by the word *discernere*. He goes further:

In the events of the age the signs of the divine will are not simply to be 'detected' but 'distinguished'. This must be considered a felicitous touch, for it drew from the spiritual tradition of the church into the framework of the conciliar text the idea of *discretio spirituum*, the discernment of spirits. This happily completes the Council's novel enterprise and marks the historical context in
which it in fact stands, revealing under what, at first
glance, seems its secular aim, a spiritual purpose and
depth.\textsuperscript{162}

Ratzinger then acknowledges that the officium perscrutandi
signa temporum on the level of faith, apparently a secular means
to a secular end, is indeed a function for a "spiritual purpose" and
contains a "spiritual depth".

\textit{The Council Novel Enterprise.} The officium perscrutandi signa
temporum et sub Evangelii luce interpretandi is the Council's novel
enterprise, according to Ratzinger. Joseph Folliet is more inclined
to refer to it as "a novelty of the method". The novelty here con­sists of the Council's concession of importance to the analytic and
descriptive method that obviously characterizes the first part of
the Pastoral Constitution.\textsuperscript{163} Accordingly, the method shifted
from "from above" (meaning, the point of departure is Revelation)
to "from below" (which means that the point of departure is a
"sincere observation of the concrete world of the modern
man".\textsuperscript{164} The recognition of the novelty of the method used by
the Council confirms one of our propositions articulated in
chapter 4 which asserts that the evolutionary character of the
historical heritage has effected a shift in the methodology of the
social doctrine of the Church. Richard Mc Cormick says that,
during the Council, "the method moved from deduction to induc­tion
and the point of departure being the 'historical moment'".\textsuperscript{165}

Actually, the method of \textit{Gaudium et spes} shifted from pure
deductive procedure to a dynamic inductive-deductive dialectic. We
shall discuss this thoroughly in part III. What is befitting to men­tion
now are the two scores of development with regards to the
ecclesial duty to read and interpret the signs of the times. The
first is the novelty of the Church's enterprise to recognize the
value and contribution of the social sciences just in time with
the second point, that is, the decision on the part of the Church
to dialogue with the world in the spirit of \textit{aggiornamento}. The
first serves as an appropriate means to an end, the second.

Finally, Paul VI, in his discourse on the signs of the times,
exhorts us to be circumspect and be guarded against three dangers
in scrutinizing the same, namely: (1) charismatic propheticism, (2)
pure phenomenalism, and (3) "historism".\textsuperscript{167} The first danger con-
sists of an immediate belief on insignificant events or mere coincidences interpreted as messages from above or as miracles. It can also be what Bishop Sebastian Soares de Resende has brought up, that at the end of the first millennium different people «prophesized» tragically and full of pessimism, and that because we traverse the period of time very close to the second millennium, we ought to exercise with maximum objectivity the function of reading the signs of the times.\footnote{168}

The second danger is pure phenomenalism. Since \textit{signa temporum} exists as «signpost» that leads thinking into pure phenomenology or empiricism, the danger lies in the acceptance of sensible experience as true knowledge or as the true touchstone to check the veracity of a theological practice. In the perception of this danger, one needs to remember that \textit{signa temporum} as such are but acts or human events and not norms, therefore they necessitated to be interpreted in the light of faith for them to be employed as point of departure in ethics, for faith is the ultimate criterion in interpretation. Lastly, the danger of «historicism», which means that the events and phenomena are seen solely from the historical perspective, neglecting that the central event is the Christ-event, meaning, the historical meaning of Jesus in time and in the world in the kairowlogical sense. The deviation here consists of the mere historical interpretation of the theological event instead of the sublime theological interpretation of a historical event. Paul VI urges us that when ambiguity of hermeneutic arises, be it on the certainty of the truth on the doctrinal level or the common good is in question on the level of praxis, one must seek the assistance of the Magisterium. «May the living words of our Lord: 'Stay awake' (Lk.21:36) reverberate. May the Christian vigilance be for us the art of discerning the signs of times», says the Holy Father.\footnote{169}

As a fitting conclusion of part two and a point of reference of next treatise on the methodology of the social doctrine of the Church, we quote the Pastoral Constitution:

Thus, the human race has passed from a rather static concept of reality to a more dynamic, evolutionary one. In consequence there has arisen a new series of problems, a series as numerous as can be, calling for new efforts of analysis and synthesis (\textit{Gaudium et spes}, n. 5).
1. In spite of the fact that the expression «signs of the times» first appeared in the Gospel, then in *Humanae salutis* (1961) and in *Pacem in terris* (1963)—that is, the phraseology is a biblical text first and then a pontifical text in the priority of time—later pontifical, synodal and episcopal social documents would acknowledge *Gaudium et spes* as the origin of their citation. Thus is the reason d'etre of the conciliar document as the particular context of the expression «signs of the times»

2. BONAVENTURE KLOPPENBURG, *The Ecclesiology of Vatican II*, Intro., p. xiv. And he continues in p. xv that «since the Church is both immanent and transcendent, it must be open, ready and disposed to recommence its incarnation in new forms and in new historical and cultural contexts, and not link itself exclusively or indissolubly to any race or nation to any one set of customs, to any particular way or life, old or new.» Yves Congar, another peritus of the Council, analyzed the events leading up to the Second Vatican Council. See *Report From Rome* (London: Chapman LTD 1964), part I, pp. 7-18; trans. by A. Manson from the French *Vatican II, Le Concile au Jour le Jour* (Paris: Cerf, 1963).


9. JOHN XXIII, «Sermon at Whitsun» in *L'Osservatore Romano* (December 26-27, 1961), p. 5. The theory of a «World-Church» has penetrated almost all levels of the Catholic Church's dialogue with the world, most especially in the religious or the ecumenical level. This theory was realized prominently in praxis when John Paul II, in a historic gesture, prayed with the leaders of the world's great religions in Assisi (Italy) on October 4, 1987.
13. The papal speech of September 11 mentioned the difference between the Church's internal structure or its vitality *ad intra* and the Church in face of the demands and needs of the nations or its vitality *ad extra* followed by an inventory of problems which will form the essentials of *Gaudium et spes* see Moeller, p. 8. In the speech, what de Riedmatten underlined is the papal expressed wish that the Church must show itself to be the Church of all, and especially to be the Church of the poor. «Ya hemos consignado que Juan XXIII, el 11 de septiembre de 1962, indicaba que frente a los países subdesarrollados, 'la Iglesia se presente tal cual es y quiere ser: la Iglesia de los pobres'», de Riedmatten, p. 60. On December 1 meeting of some 50 bishops in the Belgian College in Rome, Cardinal Suenens stressed the necessity of a secretariat that would handle social questions and problems while on December 6 speech, Cardinal Lercaro emphatically insisted on the necessity of speaking about the Church of the poor. According to Moeller, the pontifical commission *Justitia et Pax*, announced at Christmas and there by instituted by Paul VI appointing Maurice Cardinal Roy as the first presiding officer, fulfilled this hope of a secretariat. See p. 11.
14. The opening address of October 11 entitled *Ecclesia Christi, lumen gentium* emphasised the two essential aspects of the conciliar text; the Church *ad intra*, a dogmatic constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* (last two words of the opening address) and the Church *ad extra*, a pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes* would eventually be produced. H. de Riedmatten reported that in a speech of Cardinal Montini, as early as 1960, at the Mendola in the course of traditional Milan University Week, the future Paul VI emphasised that the council was of course devoting special attention to the modern world, with which the Church must increasingly *engage in dialogue*. See p. 59. The *Informations Catholiques Internationales* organized on May 13 and 14 of 1961 two study sessions on «The Church, the Council and the Others». The prospectus announced: «A glance at the world. What is the present-day world like? What are its hopes and fears? What road are men following and where to? What do they expect of the Church?» See de Riedmatten, pp. 59-60.
15. These penetrating questions of Dom Helder Camara, «the humble apostle of the poor» (in the words of Wycislo) are reflected in almost all commentaries. See de Riedmatten, pp. 61-62; Moeller, pp. 10-11; and Wycislo, p. 145.
16. This is another central idea of *Gaudium et spes*, that of the connection between human dignity and the biblical truth of man as the image of God. Cf. Moeller, p. 6.
18. Moeller, p. 31.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 35. Bishop Mark McGrath offered a minute observation on the debates about the schema in his article, «La primera discusión sobre el es-
quema en el Concilio: 1964» in La Iglesia en el mundo de hoy (Barauna), pp. 171ff.

20. Moeller and de Riedmatten believe that the phraseology is derived from Pacem in terris and therefore has a general historical sense. On the contrary, the present author’s theory is that here in TEXT 3 the expression «signs of the times» connotes an evangelical sense. We can prove this by the fact that it was strongly criticized by some World Council of Churches observers on a letter dated May 29, 1964 and by some biblical scholars who argued that the precise Matthean eschatological meaning does not fit the schema. Marie-Dominique Chenu did a short historical analysis of TEXT 3 in «Los signos de la época», pp. 99-100.


22. Moeller, p. 93.

23. Moeller, pp. 35 and 36. Some later commentators will take notice of this important observation. See, for instance, Antoncich, Christians in the Face of Injustice, p. 64 where he makes an analysis of the expression «signs of the times» and its practical application to the Latin American proper Sitz im leben. See also J. Díaz, «La teología fundamental y los signos de los tiempos», in Ciencia Tomista (Enero-Abril 1988), 115, pp. 3ff.

24. Members: Bishop D’Souza, Frs. Danielou, Gagnebet, Lebret, Tucci. Periti: Msgrs. Ligutti and Philips, Canon Moiller, Frs. de Riedmatten, Joblin, Galarru, Gregory, Galilea, Medina, Dingemanns, Greco, Martelet, Neuner. Lay specialists: Habicht, Norris, Ruxzkowski, and Sugranyes de Franch. Bishops from Africa, India, Japan, Syria, Brazil (Helder Camara), USA, France, and Poland (Wojtila, the future John Paul II) we were invited to take part to ensure that the different continents were represented. Canon Moeller made some clarifications on the methodology of description by asking: Should the documents be based on theology, natural law or concrete situations? Who is speaking? The hierarchy, the Council, the People of God (notion taken from Lumen gentium)? Msgr. Philips stressed the gravity of demonstrating that the schema is not concerned with the Church coram («in face of») the world, but «in» the world. F. Houtart’s book Eglise et monde (Brussels: Editions universitaires, 1964) made a considerable influence in the drafting of the schema. Cf. Moeller, pp. 40, 94-95. This subcommission has formulated a working definition of the signs of the times: «Los fenómenos que, por su generalización y frecuencia, caracterizan una época y expresan las necesidades y aspiraciones de la humanidad presente. Seguía un análisis de las mutaciones de la humanidad con sus consecuencias sobre la situación de hombre, sus valores, socialización, racionalidad, libertad (relatio of the subcommission’s secretaries, Canons Delhaye and Houtart, November 17, 1964), cited by M-D. Chenu, «Los signos de la época», in La Iglesia en el mundo actual, p. 100.

25. For the complete version of TEXT 4, see Gil Hellin et al, Synopsis historica, pp. 54 ff., col II.


27. Gil Hellin et al, Synopsis historica, p. 483. Fore a more detailed analysis, we deem it proper to incorporate the Latin text.

28. Ibid., p. 498.
29. Ibid., p. 541.
30. Ibid., p. 559.
31. Ibid., p. 566.
33. Gil Hellin et al, Synopsis historica, p. 626.
34. Cf. Moeller, p. 62. It is reported, a significant detail by Chenu, that an amendment was passed asking for the removal of the expression signa praesentiae Dei with a reference to the events and aspiration of man of today in schema 13, no. 11 (expension modorum p. 152). The commission rejected the amendment, nonetheless. Cf. «Los signos de la época», p. 102. It could be right to preempt that the expressions signa praesentiae Dei (Gaudium et spes, no. 11), signa temporum (no. 4), and vox temporum (TEXT 3) signifies one and the same meaning.
35. Cf. Moeller, pp. 64, 97-98.
38. Chenu offers a fitting commentary on the interplay between the aggiornamento program of John XXIII (continued by Paul VI) and the notion of the signs of the times. «Pablo VI en su primera encíclica Ecclesiam suam, se alista expresamente en esta problemática de Juan XXIII, e introduce, para operar el aggiornamento, contra quien ‘situe la perfección en la inmutabilidad de las formas que la Iglesia se ha dado en el curso de los siglos’, el análisis de los signos de la época: hay que estimular en la Iglesia la atención siempre despierta a los signos de la época, y una apertura indefinidamente joven que sepa ‘comprobarlo todo y retener lo bueno’ (I Tim. 5:21), en cualquier tiempo y circunstancia». This theme is repeated in other occasions. Paul VI: «Nos quisiéramos que se continuara reflexionando sobre este hecho (the Papal Pilgrimage to the Holy Land), y no solamente en Nos, que sentimos el deber y la necesidad de ello, sino en todos los fieles que comprendan, piensen y spean descifrar los signos de la época» (Allocution to the Faithful after the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, January 8, 1964). See «Los signos de la época», p. 97 and note 2.
39. For a detailed description of the criticism of nimis sociologicum et nimis optimisticum, see Joseph Folliet, «Condición del Hombre en el mundo actual» in La Iglesia en el mundo de hoy (Barauna), pp. 290-291.
41. The phraseology appears also in Pacem in terris. «De hecho, la encíclica Pacem in terris, del 11 de abril de 1963, en cada una de sus cuatro partes, se concluye con enumeración de los signos de la época como otras tantas manifestaciones de los valores evangélicos en trabajo dentro de los movimientos de la historia: socialización, promoción de las clases trabajadoras,
aparición de la mujer en la vida pública, emancipación de los pueblos colonizados, etc." Chenu, «Los signos de la época», p. 97

42. Cardinal Silva Enriquez’s homily be taken as an entry of the social magisterium of a single bishop. The following is another: «Part of this argument is to show how this inductive pastoral approach, based on an analysis of the signs of the times in the light of faith, has been effectively applied by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, especially through the Social Affairs Commission. The development of this approach can be seen in the bishops ‘Words to Action’ of 1976, through their ‘Witness to Justice’ of 1979 and ‘Unemployment the Human Cost’ of 1980; top the most recent ‘Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis.’ «Position paper entitled Culture, Gospel Values, and the Canadian Economy: The church Enters the Public Dialogue in The Church and Culture since Vatican II, ed. by Joseph Gremillion (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), p. 125.

43. Paul VI enumerates the other places in the documents of Vatican II, besides Gaudium et spes, no.4, where the notion (signs of the times) could be found: «...la vislumbramos en la página admirable de n.10, luego en los nn.ll, 42, 44 (actually, these notions are not the exact expression but notions that express the same meaning as the signs of the times); y también en el Decreto sobre el Apostolado de los laicos, no.14; en la Constitución sobre la Sagrada liturgia, no.43, etc.» in his allocution dated April 16, 1969, Enseñanzas al Pueblo de Dios, p. 51.

44. In addition to his social magisterium, Paul VI frequently used the expression «signs of the times» in his addresses, allocutions, and homilies. On April 16, 1969, he dedicated a discourse solely on the notion n «La Iglesia nos enseña a discernir los ‘signos de los tiempos’, Ibid., pp. 50 ff.

45. «Following Paul VI (OA, no.4), we can formulate the matter this way: attentive to the signs of the times, which are interpreted in the light of the Gospel and the Church’s magisterium, the whole Christian community is called upon to assume responsibility for concrete options and their effective implementation.» CELAM, Evangelization at Present and in the Future of Latin America (Puebla, Mexico, January 27-February 13, 1979), Final Document, part II no.4. The Bishops’ Council of Brazil, in its Pastoral Letter On Basic Christian Communities of November 1982 quoted the Medellin’s text on the signs of the times, no.18.


47. The next of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s document that contains the phraseology is Libertatis conscientia, published on March 22, 1986: «Thus the quest for freedom and the aspiration to liberation, which are among the principal signs of the times in the modern world, have their first source in the Christian heritage," chapt. I, no. 5.

48. On a national level, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a collective ethical reflection on the socioeconomic order of Canada: Ethical
Choices and Political Challenges on December 13, 1983. After listing the concrete problems the Church faces (massive unemployment, social deprivation, increasing marginalization, economic disparities, ecological damage, etc.), the statement goes: «Taken together, these are some of the disturbing signs of the times emerging in this new industrial age. To us, they indicate a deepening moral disorder in our society», chapt. II.

49. On May 15, 1991, another social encyclical by John Paul II is published on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Leo XIII's Rerum novarum, 1991 being the Year of the Social Doctrine of the Church. Besides the commemorative reflection on the one hundred year of existence of the historical heritage in the modern times and its considerable impact on the socio-economic life of man in all levels, from the family to the community of nations in general, the Holy Father carefully studies and interprets the new signs of the times that certainly affects so much percentage of the earth's living inhabitants. The Gulf crisis, that shook the world's order and whose effects will be felt in generations to come, cannot escape the lucid intelligence of the contemporary man as the leading sign of the times in this valley of tears that carries within a message rom the times» is forgotten, it may be said that the Church will always fulfill her duty (munus) of discerning the socio-historical realities, offering principles for reflections, criteria for good judgement and guidelines for social actions.

50. Vatican Council II, Sacrosanctum concilium, no. 2
52. The dual danger avoided later by the 1971 Synod of Bishops calls to mind, namely: (1) the identification of the divine and the human that may lead to the reduction of the Church's mission into a «temporal project»; and (2) the exclusion of the social dimension in evangelization. See chapt. 4 of this dissertation on the social mission of the Church.
54. Vatican Council II, Gaudium et spes, no. 25.
55. Ibid., no. 55.
56. Ibid., footnote to Preface, no. 1. Part I consists of the following chapters: I. The Dignity of the Human Person, II. The Community of Mankind, III. Man's Activity Throughout the World, and IV. The Role of the Church in the Modern World.
58. Personal noted jotted during the lectures of J. L Illanes Maestre under the title «El mundo como punto de referencia de la teología espiritual», Faculty of Theology, University of Navarra, October 8-27, 1990.
59. According to Charles Moeller, the subject of Christian cosmology was present in Malines TEXT 2 and TEXT 4, but almost completely disappeared from TEXT 5 and 6 through anxiety not to go beyond what is biblically certain in this respect.» «History of the Constitution» in Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, vol. 5, p. 72.


62. *Ibid.*, p. 197. The central theme of *recapitulatio* of all realities in Christ is repeated in ar 45: «For God’s Word, by whom all things were made, was Himself made flesh so that as perfect man He might save all men and sum up all things in Himself. The Lord is the goal of human history, the focal point of the longings of history and of civilization, the center of the human race, the joy of every heart and the answer to all its yearning. He it is Whom the Father raised from the dead, lifted on high and stationed at His right hand, making Him judge of the living and the dead. Enlivened and united in His spirit, we journey toward the consummation of human history, one which fully accords with the counsel of God’s love: ‘To re-establish all things in Christ, both those in the heavens and those on the earth.’»

63. Moeller, p. 72.

64. «The role or function of the Church in regard to the world (munus) is not based only on the positive divine realities, such as the will of God, the mission received from Christ, the grace which the Church serves, but also on man and the human conscience to whose appeal that service and mission have the answer. This viewpoint, which was particularly advocated by the Polish bishops, was very influential in *Gaudium et spes* (cf. arts. 11 and 43), which, as we have seen, does not take the Christ-event as its starting point.» Yves Congar, «The Role of the Church in the Modern World», p. 213.


68. Yves Congar, «The Role of the Church in the Modern World», p. 213. The footnote says that *Gaudium et spes* does not determine more precisely the conditions of the collaboration with other Christians and with all men of goodwill.


70. Prior to Vatican II, the Church was «too preoccupied with this danger. It is too fearful of infection from the world and too strong in urging the Christian to pass his life as ‘one departing and about to pass on’. This preoccupation, which seems excessive to me, is the result of a certain omission...» complains Cardinal Meyer. Vincent Yzermans. *American Participation in the Second Vatican Council*, p. 232.

71. We retrospect here the intervention of Bishop Rada Senosiain: *Dialogus itaque cum mundo bodierno non potest haberi ut objectum buius solius schematis, sed totius Concilii, immo totius vitae Ecclesiae*, in Gil Hellin et al, *Synopsis historica*, p. 626.


74. See chapter 2 of this dissertation, on the constitutive elements of the social doctrine of the Church. Man’s relationship with God is reduced—in Chris-
tian anthropology, according to Karl Rahner—to an opposition and union of spirit and matter (body and soul, what is contingent and what is permanent) deprived of the profound unity-in-opposition. See «Theological Anthropology» in *Encyclopedia of Theology*, p. 888.

75. Alfons Auer, «Man's Activity throughout the World» in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, p. 186. Actually there is a striking portion in *Ecclesiam suam* that somehow considered dialogue with a certain partner scarcely possible; that partner is atheism: «In these circumstances dialogue is very difficult, not to say impossible...Instead of dialogue, there, therefore there is silence...How can a dialogue be conducted in such circumstances as these, even if we embarked upon it? It would be but a 'voice crying in the wilderness'.» *The Papal Encyclicals*, ed. by Claudia Carlen (Wilmington: Mc Grath Publ. C., 1981), vol. 5, p. 150.

76. Cf. chapter 2 of this dissertation, on the object of the social doctrine of the Church. Man is the material object of both Christian anthropology and social doctrine of the Church.

77. Cf. chapter 3 of this dissertation, on the social mission of the Church.

78. «Christ is the light of all nations. Hence this most sacred Synod (Vatican II), which has been gathered in the Holy Spirit, eagerly desires to shed that radiance of His which brightens the countenance of the Church.» *Lumen Gentium*, no. 1. To this, Walter Kasper shares his piece of mind: «Christ is the light of humanity. The Church, proclaiming the Gospel, must see to it that this light clearly shines out from her countenance. The Church makes herself credible if she speaks less of herself and even more preaches Christ crucified and witnesses with her own life. The message of the Church, as described in the Second Vatican Council, is Trinitarian and Christocentric.» in *Jesus the Christ* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), p. 207.


81. Ratzinger, «Dignitatis humanae» in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, p. 150. The conciliar debates on Marxist atheism and anthropology and communism occurred on October 20 and November 5, 1964, and on September 22-28., 1965. The Council Fathers made a distinction between communism which is the political and economic dimension and Marxism which is the philosophical system, between «postulary» atheism and Marxist atheism.

82. On the topic of Marxist atheism, see chapter 4 of this dissertation on the historical factors that gave rise to the historical heritage. For Karl Marx the «dehumanization» is brought about by man's labor in a capitalist society, an «economic alienation.» In order to survive in a competitive world man is forced «to sell his soul» with the sweat of his brows according to the Iron Law of Wages, D. Ricard's theory that wages tend to fall to subsistence level (J. de Torre, *Marxism, Socialism and Christianity*). Karl Marx, cognizant of the dehumanization of his time, proposed another type of anthropology or humanism whose notion was *homo faber*, latter called by
Stalin as «the precious capital». *Homo faber* is the productive man, the manual laborer who works directly on matter, thus the rejection of any kind of transcendence. Cf. Rene Coste, *Marxist Analysis and Christian Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985), p. 113. Secondly Marxist anthropology is characterised by collectivism or classism, a deliberate counter position vis-a-vis the Christian «individualism» (from the point of view of Marx) which has deeply marked the recent-past history of the Church. Marxism’s exclusive interest is the collective sense of humanity. The personality plainly dissolves in the midst of society and the unique person is but a drop in the bucket of the faceless and nameless crowd. See Nicolai Berdyaev, *The Origin of Russian Communism* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1955), pp. 125-129. With respect to the Christian «individualism», Karl Rahner writes: «The question of the history of individual salvation was propounded and answered in more individual term: beatific vision even before the general judgment; the doctrine of the votum sacramenti and therefore of a non-sacramental possibility of salvation; the inviolability of the conscience.» *Theological Anthropology*, p. 889.


84. Actually, the point of departure of the Council’s reflection on man was not *revelatio* but the actual situation of man. Alfons Auer, in his commentary, says that «the question of the meaning of human activity is not suggested by the Church and theology but is forced on people’s attention by the most urgent realities of contemporary life.» «Man’s Activity throughout the World», p. 185. We have here a case of praxis determining the type of theory.


86. On Article 14, Ratzinger makes this observation: «The whole article originally (TEXT 4) dealt solely with the «dignity of the human body’... The first words «Corpore et anima unus» are intended to express the fundamental theme of the text: the inseparable corporeal-spiritual unity of man...Consequently it had to renounce the use of the possibilities offered by the Thomist formula: *anima unica forma corporis*». He adds that Karl Rahner and Johannes B. Metz define the body as «the soul’s making itself present in the world.» See «The Dignity of the Human Person». p. 127.

87. On the special attention given to the relation between Christology and theological anthropology, Rahner offers three insights: (1) People already knew what «man» was when they set about saying that Christ is a true man, (2) People were clear that Christ is man in an «ideal way» and so is an example to men and the ideal model for a theological doctrine of man, but a model which, strictly speaking, was not required by anthropology, and (3) Anthropology needs Christology as its criterion and guide; it is nevertheless not appropriate to sketch out theological anthropology solely on the basis of Christology. See «Theological Anthropology», p. 892-893.


89. «These (permanent) principles (for reflection) have not been formulated by the Church organically in one single document, but throughout the entire span of the historical evolution of her social doctrine,* Congregation for Catholic Education, *Guideline for the Study and Teaching of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 30.

90. *Guideline*, no. 31. «According to the almost unanimous opinion of believers and unbelievers alike, all things on earth should be related to man as their center and crown,* *Gaudium et spes*, no. 17. The anthropological import of this principle constitutes the source of other principles which are part of the corpus of the social doctrine.

91. According to the *Guideline*, the Church will never tire but will always insist on the dignity of the human person—against all slavery, exploitation and manipulation perpetuated, not only in the field of politics and economics, but also in the cultural and medical field, no. 31

92. *Vatican Council II*, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 41. See also nos. 26,73,76. The assertion of human rights arose in the Church more as a concrete service to human nature by the Creator, than as a theoretical, organic and complete system. Cf. *Guideline*, no. 32.

93. Ibid., no. 33. If *Pacem in terris* is the charter of human rights, then *Populorum progressio* is the charter of the poor people's right to development. John Paul II deepens his reflection by basin human rights on the three dimensions of the integral truth about man: on man's dignity as such; on man as *imago Dei*; and on man inserted into Christ's mystery. Cf. *Redemptor hominis* (March 4, 1979).

94. The inviolable rights include the right of people to their own identity and development. CF. John Paul II, *Redemptor hominis*, no. 17; Message *L'Eglise catholique* to the civil authorities who signed the Helsinki Agreement on 1975, on freedom of conscience and religion (September 1, 1980): AAS 72 (1980), pp. 1252ff.; and Allocution to the U.N. Representatives on October 2, 1979: AAS 71 (1979), pp. 1146-1147.

95. A distinction is made by the *Guideline* concerning «sociality» and «collectivity». Sociality pertains to the intrinsic social nature of man while in collectivity the person is only «a mere product.» See no. 35.

96. Through the common good is higher than private interests, it is inseparable from the good of the human person. The implementation of the common good is the raison d'être of public authorities who must recognize, respect, regulate and the integral development of all men and the whole man. See John XXIII, *Pacem in terris*, 55-59.

97. *Guideline*, no. 37: «The Church stresses its human meaning (of common good) and ability to animate social structures in their globality and in their particular sectors, by encouraging *indepth transformations according to the criterion of social justice*» (emphasis added).

98. John Paul II underlines the importance of the principle of solidarity and deem it both as a human and a Christian virtue. As a Christian virtue, he identifies some points of contact between solidarity covers: total gratuity,
forgiveness and reconciliation. «One's neighbor must be loved, even if an enemy, with the same love with which the Lord loves him or her...Beyond human and natural bonds, already so close and strong, there is discerned in the light of faith a now model of the unity of the human race, which must ultimately inspire our solidarity. This supreme model of unity, which is a reflection of the intimate life of God—one God in three Persons—is what we Christians mean by the word 'communion'.» Sollicitudo rei socialis, no. 40. While Opus justitiae pax is the motto of Pius XII, Opus solidaritatis pax is a dictum of John Paul II.

99. By virtue of the principle of subsidiarity, «neither the State nor any society must ever substitute itself for the initiative and responsibility of individuals and of intermediate communities at the level on which they can function, nor must they take away the room necessary for their freedom. Hence the Church' social doctrine is opposed to all forms of collectivism,» Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Libertatis conscientia, no. 73. See also Pius XI, Quadragesimo anno, nos. 79-80; John XXIII, Mater et magistra, no. 138 and Pacem in terris, no. 74.

100. The principle of participation is a deep human aspiration which expresses man's dignity and freedom in scientific and technical progress in the world of work and public life. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Libertatis conscientia, no. 86: «Whatever type of work, the worker must be able to perform it as an expression of his personality. There follows from this the necessity of a participation which, over and above a sharing in the fruits of work, should involve a truly communitarian dimension at the level of projects, undertakings and responsibilities.» Cf. also Vatican Council II, Gaudium et spes, no. 68 and John Paul II, Laborem exercens, no. 15.

101. John Paul II, Sollicitudo rei socialis, no. 42. Private property is under a «social mortgage». See also His Holiness' Address at the Opening of the Third General Conference of the Latin American Bishops on January 28, 1979: AAS 71(1979), pp. 189-196; Ad limina Address to Polish Bishop on December 17, 1987 in L'Osservatore Romano (December 18, 1987).

102. Vatican Council II, Gaudium et spes, no. 69. See also Paul VI, Populorum progressio, no. 22 and Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Libertatis conscientia, no. 90.


104. John Paul II, Laborem exercens, no. 14. In addition to the seven principles, the Guideline embodies two others, namely: the organic concept of social life; and the human structure and communities of persons. See nos. 39 and 41.

105. See Guideline, no. 43; and Libertatis conscientia, nos. 3, 4, 26, and 57. Holy Mother the Church, while recognizing the autonomy of earthly realities, as an expert in humanity, admits that the positive laws instituted by man for social management do not in themselves guarantee, almost mechanically, the common good. Thus is the raison d'être of the fundamental values which demonstrate so forcefully the priority or ethics over techniques, the primacy of persons (being) over things (having), the superiority of the spirit over matter. Cf. John Paul II, Redemptor hominis, no. 16.
NOTES

108. This discourse of Paul VI is cited in Jose Carillo (ed.), *La Iglesia en el mundo actual*, p. 103.
112. See J. Severino Croatto, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987), pp. 7-8. Spanish edition: *Hermenéutica bíblica: Para una teoría de la lectura como producción sentido* (Buenos: Asociación Ediciones la Aurora, 1984). Several of our terminologies are borrowed form the glossary of this work. On the basis of the similarity between the Bible (TEXT where God speaks) and the signs of the time (the present reality as TEXT), we are applying some principles of biblical hermeneutics to this treatise of *signa temporum*. St. Augustine teaches that God wrote two books: the profane book of the world and the Holy Book of the Scriptures. It was because the first became illegible, by reason of sin, that God authored the second, in order that by the second we should be able to re-read the first, in such wise that now «all creation becomes for us a revelation of God». cited in Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations*, p. 303.
117. Cf. St. Augustine, *De doctrina christiana II*; *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 34, p. 35. St. Thomas systematized the treatise on the signs. See *Summa Theologica*, III, q. 60, a.1. and a.4.
120. If *sacramentum* were only signification, it would not rise above the ancient rites of the Jewish Laws. If it were only causation, it would at once loose its historic value; it would no longer be reviving of a past, that is, the historic event of the paschal mystery. *Sacramentum* therefore must be a sign in such wise as to actually represent the past, and it must be a cause in such wise as to actually effect what it proclaims. In St. Thomas’s metaphysical definition of the sacrament, signification is the genus and causation is the specific difference; and the formal element is not causation but signification.
121. The word «diacritic» emanates from the terminology of orthography (the correct writing of signs, especially words, in linguistics) and medicine which basically signifies a «distinguishing mark». The words «diagnosis» and «prognosis» belong to medicine and pedagogy.
123. Paul VI, «La Iglesia nos enseña a discernir los ‘signos de los tiempos’», p. 50.
125. See chapter 5 of this dissertation, note 20.
127. Paul VI, «La Iglesia nos enseña a discernir ‘los signos de los tiempos’», p. 51. According to the pope, the entire universe (cosmos) is an open book to be read.
128. «...Se trata de individuar ‘en los tiempos’, es decir en el curso de los acontecimientos, en la historia, aquellos ‘signos’ que pueden traernos noticias de una Providencia inmanente; que pueden servirnos de señal de una cierta relación con el ‘Reino de Dios’, con su obrar secreto, o bien hablarnos de la posibilidad de la disponibilidad, de la exigencia de una acción apostólica. Creemos que estos indicios son precisamente los ‘signos de los tiempos’», Paul VI, Ibid., p. 52
130. «For the human person deserves to be preserved; human society deserves to be renewed. Hence the focal point of our total presentation will be man himself, whole and entire, body and soul, heart and conscience, mind and will,» Gaudium et spes, no. 3. Chapters 1-3 of the part I of the Pastoral Constitution is dedicated to the treatise on man. See also the anthropological content of the cont-text of the signs of the times in the present chapter of the dissertation.
132. Adolf Darlapp. and Jorg Splett, «History» in Encyclopedia of Theology, p.618. For an analysis of the concept of the «world» in Gaudium et spes, see Alfons Auer, Man’s Activity throughout the World», pp. 182-201.
133. Cf. chapter 5 of this dissertation, p. 118.
134. Certainly human freedom occupies a special place in the occurrence of human events. «Only in freedom can man direct himself toward goodness,» says Gaudium et spes, no. 17. For a thorough commentary o man’s freedom in Articles 17 of the Pastoral Constitution, see Joseph Ratzinger, «The Dignity of the Human Person», pp. 136-140.
135. See chapter 5 of this dissertation, note 33.
137. Pablo VI, «La Iglesia nos enseña a discernir ‘los signos de los tiempos’», p. 54.
139. This definition was formulated during a meeting of the subcommission on November 17, 1964 and noted by the secretaries Delhaye and Houtart. Cf. José Carrillo, La Iglesia en el mundo actual, p. 100.
140. Some theologians deny the acceptance of those events that produce bad effect as signs of the times. Bishop Paul Gouyon, in one of his interventions in the Council on Schema 13, said that an event is certainly the voice of
God if its nature and effects are good. «Videtur eventus vocem Dei esse si natura sua et effectibus suis bonus est, see chapter 5 of this dissertation, note 31. Chenu, also, refuses to talk of atheism as a sign of the times. Cf. «Los signos de la época,» note 12.

141. For a study of the three fundamental laws of the theology of history, see Walter Kasper, Encyclopedia of Theology, pp. 632-635.

142. Pablo VI, «La Iglesia nos enseña a discernir ‘los signos de los tiempos’», p. 53. Ricardo Antoncich's insight is worth-noting: «The thing that turns a historical event into a sign of the times is the dimension of it that stimulates conversion and openness to the call of God,» Christians in the Face of Injustice: A Latin American Reading of the Catholic Social Teaching, p. 65.

143. Mark Mc Grath, «Antecedentes históricos de la Constitución» in La Iglesia en el mundo de hoy, p. 181.


145. Because she is transcendent, the Church, «sent to all peoples of every time and place, is not bound exclusively and indissolubly to any race or nation, any particular way of life or any customary pattern of life recent or ancient. Faithful to her own tradition and at the same time conscious of her universal mission, she can enter into communion with the various civilizations, to their enrichment and the enrichment of the Church herself», Gaudium et spes, no. 58.

146. Ratzinger, «The Dignity of the human Person», pp. 116-117. Archbishop Marty of Reims, in one of his interventions during the Council on the subject of Revelation, said that Tradition and Revelation must not be understood exclusively as an accumulated deposit in the past but also as related to historical events. La Tradición es algo «relacionado con los acontecimientos del mundo, con las diversas culturales de los pueblos donde se implanta la Iglesia a lo largo de los siglos. Queda bien manifestar, decía, la relación de la Revelación con la historia concreta del pueblo de Israel. Hay que manifestar lo mismo la relación entre la Tradición viva y la acción de Dios que se continúa en la historia,» from the intervention of Archbishop Marty on the 93rd General Assembly, October 2, 1964, cited in José Carrillo (ed), La Iglesia en el mundo actual, p. 107.

147. Cf. Gaudium et spes, no. 38. Human history, as we have seen above, could be understood in the perspective of the Plan of Salvation. See Christology and Cosmology on p. 129 of this dissertation and note of this chapter.

148. The Council Fathers made a distinction between recapitulatio and assumptio. See p. 130 of this dissertation.

149. We have noted the relationship of human history with the Divine Presence in the «Historical Dimension of the Social Doctrine», chapter 4 of this dissertation, p. 57. It may be recalled too that the Christ-event made present in human history the Kingdom of God. See pp. 1301-34 of this dissertation. We have just presented a theological approach. One can farther find several approaches towards a theology of the signs of the times in the following works: C. Arevalo, «On the Theology of the Signs of the Times», Philippine Priests Forum, vol. 4, no. 4 (December 1972), pp. 14-26; C. I. González, Los signos de los tiempos (Santander: Sal Terrae, 1987); A.

150. For the individual interventions of these Conciliar Fathers on the signs of the times, see chapter 5 of this dissertation, pp. 112-114 and notes 27-36.


152. See note 12 of the present chapter.

153. Cf. Yves Congar, «The Role of the Church in the Modern World» in Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II, p. 213. Congar farther explains that the activity of the Church «goes beyond the purely transfiguring activity of celebrating the sacred mysteries and the life of Christian asceticism; it already in fact does so in chapters 1-3 of part I (Gaudium et spes). It obliges men to action and even to a programme of action,» on p. 204. Actually, Congar is articulating the theological basis of this function of the Church in the modern world. Cf. Ibid., pp. 204-216.


156. Moeller, p. 99.


158. See the permanent principles derived from the theological content of Gaudium et spes, in the present chapter, most especially p. 142 and notes 44, 45.

159. «Los signos de los tiempos son hechos, pero en sí no son normas; necesitan ser juzgados según criterio ético...Para los signos de los tiempos, el código de lectura que nos permite descifrar su sentido, no es otra cosa que la fe,» J. M. Aubert, «Moral cristiana y los signos de los tiempos» in Montelegre 126 (Feb-March 1987), pp. 4-5. The element of faith in the interpretation of the signs of the times is also treated in Bernard Haring, «Nuevos derroteros, nuevas perspectivas,» in La Iglesia en el mundo de hoy, pp. 691ff. 160. Moeller, p. 69.


162. Cf. Joseph Folliet, «La condición de hombre en el mundo de hoy» in La Iglesia en el mundo de hoy (Barauna), pp. 289-290. We may recall here that,
during the formulation of TEXT 3, the *Subcommisio de signis temporum* was instructed to divide the whole schema into three parts: (1) description of facts, (2) theological principles and (3) applications. The subcommission's job consisted precisely of drafting the descriptive part which later became the Introductory Statement of *Gaudium et spes*. See p. 111 of the present chapter. Bishop Mark Mc Grath, during his presentation of the introductory section to the Council in the Fourth Session, has pointed the «novelty of the proposed schema» and that the description was not exhaustive. See Moeller, pp. 96-97.

163. After explaining the «from below» method, the author indicates farther the Council's dismissal of deduction and its approval of inductive process. «Intentando hacerse oir de todos los hombres, el Concilio ha rehusado cons­cientemente sacar deducciones demasiado unilaterales y exclusivas de los principios generales teológicos, para después ‘aplicar’ esas deducciones al mundo de esta época....Así, pues, el Concilio ha empleado al procedimiento inverso, al intentar descubrir inductivamente, partiendo de la experiencia, los ‘signos de los tiempos’ (Mt. 16:3), para interpretarlos después a la luz de la fe revelada y colocarlos bajo el Evangelio de Cristo.» Barauna, *La Iglesia en el mundo de hoy*, p. 328.


166. Paul VI, «La Iglesia nos enseña a discernir ‘los signos de los tiempos’», pp. 52-54.

167. See note 30 of chapter 5 of this dissertation.

168. Paul VI, «La Iglesia nos enseña a discernir ‘los signos de los tiempos’», p. 54.