I. A LINGUISTIC CONSIDERATION

The English word “world” (mundus in Latin, daigdig in Tagalog, cosmos in Greek) is comprehensible in multiple acceptations of meaning. We can reduce these to four basic meanings: (1) The world as present versus the future world. The world is not the eschatological “new heaven and the new earth.” The world as present reflects the Latin connotation saeculum. (2) The ontological world, the world independent of other things, including human beings. This notion of the world in the abstract is the opposite of the concrete world which can only exist as the proper ambience of man. Man is always man-in-the-world, the world is where man finds himself all the time. (3) The world as the totality of external realities characterized by order, or simply the sum-total of all things. No living man is so sure of knowing this world, no man is know-it-all. (4) The world as one of the three lifetime traditional enemies in the battleground of man’s spirituality; the other two, the devil and the flesh. Hence the Catholic was urged of old to despise the world, contemptus mundi, and to flee the world, fuga mundi.

Among the ancient peoples it was the Greek who was caught by the mystery of the world. For him the world was order, hence the word cosmos. For him the most important science was not anthropology but cosmology, the most interesting masterpiece
was not man but the world.¹

II. FROM THE GREEK COSMOS TO THE CHRISTIAN "WORLD"

In its ontological aspect, the world is dependent and does not possess any innate perfection of itself. Positively though, the world reflects the goodness of God, its Creator. It continuously talks, as it were, about God. The song "I believe" sings the divine presence in creation: "I believe for every drop of rain that falls, a flower grows . . . Every time I hear a newborn baby cry, or touch a leaf or see the skies, then I know why. . . . " The world appeals both to faith and to reason. Any rational creature can contemplate the beauty or order of the created world and recognize its Creator. God — Who is the Divine Author of all realities, earthly and others — has the capacity to communicate His eternal goodness (capax Dei). Goodness in the world is nothing else but God-ness. No wonder Paul VI calls the world "an open book." Goodness radiates itself, bonum diffusivum sui, which means that the greatness and goodness of God can be found in all things, but not in the sense of divinization or what is called pantheism in the philosophy of religion.

Man, on the other hand, has the capacity to discover such goodness, capax hominis. The image and likeness of God in man, says Augustine, is the capacity for God, a qualification to know and love Him.² In the dialectic of his nature — that is, he is both called to the unfathomable dignity, sublimis vocatio, and at the same time, conditioned by his lifetime wretchedness, profunda miseria — man’s capacity to know God’s goodness in nature is neither total nor unlimited. While the world is plainly just itself, God is both present in the world by His creative power, and transcendent. Hence man necessarily needs the divine initiative to reveal Himself, or at least, to give a sign of His personal presence. "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." Jesus, Verbum caro factum, is the ultimate and the absolute Revelation of the Creator-God.

2. De Trinitate, XIV: 8, 11.
Meanwhile, man, who is essentially being-in-the-world, perpetually considers the world as the setting of his life and living, and ever understands it as the "world of man." On the part of the Creator, the world is the only possible place of salvation and liberation of that being-in-the-world.

III. CHRISTOLOGY AND COSMOLOGY

Article 38 of the Pastoral Constitution begins with an eloquent 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).

We are here beginning to extract the doctrinal substance of Gaudium et Spes. Charles Moeller says, however, that the subject of Christian cosmology was "present in Malines Text 2 and Text 4, but almost completely disappeared from Texts 5 and 6 through anxiety not to go beyond what is biblically certain in this respect."3 In any case, Article 38 of Gaudium et Spes is a perfect point of departure in the understanding of the theology of the world centered in Jesus.

He, the Verbum caro factum, took the whole humanity and the whole cosmos up to Himself. And what does it exactly mean?

The "theology of Jesus' taking up and renewing the whole humanity and the whole cosmos" is the theology of recapitulatio which was developed by St. Irenaeus of Lyons (140-202). First, recapitulatio pertains to the whole humanity. In his work, the first and oldest refutation against heresies, the apologist wrote: "In the beginning the Word was with God; by Him all things were made, and he was always present to the human race."4 Jesus is the Word made flesh and he was also the Word that created man and the world. In giving accent to this identity, that

is, between the "Creator Word" and the "Redeemer Word," a beautiful reflection is worth presenting here. It is the explanation of Bishop Elias Zoghby of the Greek Melkite Catholic Church of Egypt and Sudan with respect to what would be the future expression of Vatican II, "hidden seed of the Word." He intervened thus:

The Creator Word has put into every human being a divine seed which the Greek Fathers (like St. Irenaeus) call the "seed of the Logos." Over the centuries the Spirit of God cultivated this seed in souls, preparing them by a "divine pedagogy" to receive the Word made flesh . . . The Church must try to discover this seed of the Word in such civilizations in order to awaken in these peoples a spontaneous readiness to receive the Word made flesh . . . It is this identity of Creator Word and Redeemer Word that makes it possible for the Church of Christ to be universal, that is, to offer the Gospel to every man who comes into the world. It is this same identity that also makes it possible for the Church to effect the unity of mankind by offering to men as their common Brother Him who has created them all out of nothing.

The theology of recapitulatio pertains also to the whole cosmos. It is imperative to clarify two things: (1) The totality of all realities, matter and spirit, is renewed. Jesus renewed all created realities with all its constitutive elements: essence, values, deficiencies, historicity and immanent qualities. Alfons Auer, in his commentary of the Pastoral Constitution’s article, remarks that

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 extrinsecus ordinatur ad Christum. Most of the Fathers however emphasized that by reason of the essential connection of the cosmos with man as the created center of its meaning, all creatures are raised to a new

5. Ad Gentes, 11.
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 order’. 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’.7

Hence, not only the whole humanity that is elevated to the supernatural order but also the whole natural world is renewed in Jesus. (2) The second is the clarification of the Council’s position with regards to any system or theory like Teilhardism. In the formulation of Article 38 of *Gaudium et Spes*, the word *assumens* was struck out on the ground that Paul’s letter to the Ephesians 1:10 did not mention *assumptio* but only *recapitulatio*, and that the idea of “cosmic incarnation” along the Teilhardist tradition was theologically disputable.8 Moeller affirms this by saying that “any confusion of Schema 13 with Teilhardism is impossible.”9

Vatican II, in the final version of *Gaudium et Spes*, makes crystalline the central theme of *recapitulatio*, covering the scope of the whole humanity and the whole *cosmos*, in Article 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’.

> So the Word was present in the beginning of creation, and the Word was made flesh in the event of the Incarnation, then

8. Ibid. 197.
the Word died and was buried and rose on the third day. That same Word will come again to re-establish all things unto Himself. In the whole panorama of salvation history, the Word continuously renews the whole man and every man, the whole universe and the proper place of man — the world. The act or unique event of recapitulatio is precisely the ontologico-theological point of contact between all things — matter and spirit, man and his cosmos — and Jesus’ paschal mystery — life, passion, death and resurrection. This point of contact makes possible for the Christ-event to “save the world.” And this view of human history and the cosmos in the perspective of the plan of salvation is what is called Christian cosmology.10

In the plan of salvation and without confusing recapitulatio with the concept of “cosmic incarnation,” we can therefore distinguish and identify three stages of the Word: the Creator Word, the Redeemer Word and the eschatological Word.

IV. THE CHURCH IN HISTORICAL ANTICIPATION

Jesus, as the Redeemer Word, has inaugurated the Kingdom of God when he personified the kingdom by His incarnation, life, word and deed, death and resurrection. Jesus “historified,” so to speak, the invisible and eternal kingdom of the Father, gave it flesh and blood and made it present. Yet the kingdom of the Father is also an eschatological reality and therefore, it is a “not yet” event, an event that is to come, an event that needs to be fulfilled. Here enters the role of the Church. According to Karl Rahner (as he develops his theory of the World-Church, Weltkirche), the Church “will need to be related to Christ the Crucified and Risen, in whose person there is the ultimate, victorious and irreversible promise of God historically manifested to the world.”11 The reason is obvious: the Christ-event is not only the starting point of the Church’s dialogue with the world but also the beginning of the realization of the promise of a transformation of the whole cosmos, that is, in the eschatological sense. As Yves Congar aptly puts it:

10. Cf. ibid.
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 then is the presence of the kingdom of God in history insofar as Jesus (the Creator Word, the Redeemer Word and the eschatological Word) is present in her, the community of the faithful, in the fullest sense. She has become the proper sacrament of Christ in the world, *sacramentum Christi*. The Church, the People of God, is neither beyond the world nor separated from it, but in truth, she is existing, living, and acting in its midst.

Nevertheless, she cannot be identified absolutely with the Kingdom, inasmuch as the kingdom of God necessitates to be realized eschatologically in the cosmic and universal level, as we have been saying. The immanent in her is coexistence with the world, but the transcendent in her belongs to the *eschata*. To give an example, we quote here the opening sentences of the Pastoral Letter under the title “Building a Society with Dignity and Morality” (1986) of the bishops of Ecuador, which reads: “Many in Ecuador suffer from material poverty, as well as spiritual poverty, and find their happiness undermined. We know well that it is only in our future homeland that every tear will be wiped away (cf. Rev 7:17).” 12 And what is true of the particular churches is true of the universal Church, that for the moment the Church stays with the world and lives in the midst of it (immanence), and much later there will be a future homeland in the coming, *eschata* (transcendence). In the here and now, Mother Church is in a “historical anticipation.” Hence we may differentiate the historical Church of Christ from the future Kingdom of God.

The next question is this: How is the Church in historical anticipation related to the eschatological Kingdom? Or better put by Congar: “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 the

sacraments?" What he is asking in effect is this: since the Church is waiting for the final renewal and fulfillment of all things, and surely this will come, is she spending her time meanwhile on purely supernatural tasks, say, of evangelization and administration of sacraments? We recall here that the social ministry of the Church is a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel. The eminent Dominican theologian answers his question in the light of Gaudium et Spes:

But it goes beyond the purely transforming 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 the Pastoral Constitution). It obliges men to action and even to a program of action . . . This fact (eschatological restoration of all realities in Jesus) imposes on the Christians the duty of working in the world to establish order in harmony with the gift of truth and grace which they have received in Jesus Christ.  

It seems then that the activity of the Church, which is both a duty and a right, must not remain in the spiritual or supernatural way of doing things, but it must touch the very nature of the world: its materiality and historicity. The Council has been stressing that the new feature of the Church, which is partly in contradiction to the attitude which marked many stages of her past history (Paul VI), is her daring permeation of society, her disinterested social and evangelizing service, her assumption of concrete responsibility towards the concrete man, and her participation in the actual construction of the present world to be a better place to live in. Even though she cannot claim to be the best part of the technical system of building the new temporal order, neither is she a mere observer. She wants to get involved, in the way that is proper to her nature and mission entrusted to her by Jesus.

The idea of the concreteness of the Church’s role in the world was espoused by Cardinals Leger, Döpfner and Meyer as early as the October 20 to November 10, 1964 conciliar debates. Cardinal Leger wanted “greater realism” on the role of the

Church, while Cardinal Meyer’s intervention was regarded as one of the most significant in expressing the theological aim of the schema in this respect. 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 (eschata) by the resurrection of the body and the mysterious transformation of the world. There will be, Scriptures tell us, a new heaven and a 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.\textsuperscript{14}

The Council taught that the essence of the whole created cosmos, in which man is the center and the world his ambience, ought to be seen not only in its plain contingency or temporality, but also in the fact that it is re-established by the Christ-event. In the present economy of salvation, besides her mission of grace, the Church is called to a mission of nature — a commitment to man and to the world, therefore, a task which is “human” and “wordly.” Eventually her work must not be restricted to the “religious and spiritual” domain,\textsuperscript{15} but must be integral — like her Teacher and Founder who is not content with the mere announcement of the truth or imparting of heavenly blessings, but certainly involved Himself with the whole business of being earthly and human.

From the doctrinal content of Gaudium et Spes, consisting of Christian cosmology and the mission of the Church in anticipation, we can derive some principles for reflection, such as the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity, participation, and the common good. These make the permanent elements of the Social

\textsuperscript{14} V. Yzermans, American Participation in the Second Vatican Council (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1967) 231.

\textsuperscript{15} Cf. Congar, “Role of the Church,” 213.
Doctrine of the Church which the Church invokes as "perennial values" in social life: familial, communitarian, local and international.

Prior to Vatican II, the Church as we noted was "too preoccupied with this danger. It is 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 certain omission . . . ," complained Cardinal Meyer.16

The Church's phobia of infection or contamination from the saeculum, from the world, is now an erstwhile past of ecclesial history. On the contrary, the People of God "infects the world with Christ" instead, in the words of John XXIII. The Doctor of the Signs of the Times started it all: "The Church is now called upon to take the perennial, vital divine power of the Gospel and inject it into the veins of the human society of today."17 Paul VI, in perfect succession, writes: "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."18 Our Church — conscious of her supernatural salvific mission yet aware also of her immanent position, with both feet on the ground — has decided to stoop down to talk face to face with man-in-the-world. And finally, the Pastoral Constitution, promulgated on 7 December 1965 "ad gloriam Dei," states:

The Council focuses its 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 as 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.19

19. Gaudium et Spes, 2.
CELAM would later pray that the Church in Latin America (and that applies to the Church in Asia and the Pacific, in Africa, North America, Australia and Europe) would work at her integral task of salvation and liberation “to join Christ in effectively moving the history of our people toward the Kingdom.”

20. *Puebla*, 274; cf. also 118.