



Kuntatt

An online newsletter run by the
Theology Students Association

First Issue 2024 | November

Introductory Message

Hello,

Greetings from the President of the Theology Students Association
Adam Baldacchino, B.A. (Hons.) Theology with Philosophy student

I would like to welcome you to this newest edition of Kuntatt, an online newsletter which is now being spearheaded by the Theology Students Association (TSA). The newsletter is an initiative of the current TSA executive team which started its term in June of 2024. It has been written entirely by current or past students, and which I hope reflects the dedication and enthusiasm which was nurtured by the Faculty of Theology. I would like to thank the Faculty for entrusting us with Kuntatt.

I hope that these articles will provide thought-provoking theological insights, whether you are current or former students, University staff or perhaps persons who are interested in theology. For those interested in studying theology at the University of Malta, there are several courses available, including the part-time Bachelor's in Theology and Sacred Scripture, as well as the part-time Diploma in Religious Studies, all of which are suitable for persons who work full-time and Master's degrees in Bioethics and Business Ethics, Spirituality and Spiritual Companionship. The full list of courses is available [here](#). The Faculty of Theology would be more than happy to answer any questions about studying with them.

In this issue, you can explore the Vatican II Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*, and dive into a spiritual reading of Caravaggio's painting "The Calling of Saint Matthew". We also have a contribution on Chiara Lubich's spirituality, and on a more personal level, a student's perspective of what it's like to study theology.

I hope that you find this issue interesting. If you would like to be involved in the next issue of Kuntatt, email us at ghst@um.edu.mt.

Enjoy,
Adam Baldacchino
GhST President

Contents

Introductory Message.....	1
A Moment of Magisterium	3
A Picture Worth A Thousand Words.....	4
Reading Nook.....	6
Just Thinking Aloud: Reflections on Studying Theology	6
A Window into The Soul.....	7
Dulcis in Fundo.....	9

A Moment of Magisterium

By Janet Sultana, B.A. (Hons.) Theology student

Next year marks the 60th anniversary of Vatican Council II, whose teachings led the Church on a journey of renewal by engaging with the modern world. Conciliar teachings are normative for Catholics (i.e., they determine what Catholics believe) but they still remain to be taught and understood more widely. Vatican Council II promulgated four constitutions, and in each newsletter issue, we will look briefly at one.

Gaudium et spes (GS) teaches that humanity has entered a “new stage of history” (GS 4) due to rapid developments in technology. The way that science has influenced contemporary thought, life and culture has often been beneficial by creating wealth and improving standards of living. At the same time, these scientific developments can also be a danger for humanity. Indeed, those participating in the Vatican Council II (1962 to 1965) would have seen the horrors of the World War II a few decades prior and felt the dread of the Cold War which could have escalated to nuclear war at any moment.

Another important teaching of GS is the acknowledgement that, against the backdrop of uncertainty in the modern world, humanity is being renewed through Christ, both in those who are Christians and those who are not. Indeed, GS embraces all humanity when it refers to “all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way” (GS 22). While appreciating that mankind is set apart from other creatures because of its intelligence, GS also proposes that it is not mankind which should be at the centre of history and human activity, but Christ: “The Lord is the goal of human history, the focal point of the longings of history and of civilization, the centre of the human race, the joy of every heart and the answer to all its yearnings” (GS 45). GS

proposes that, by bringing Christ to the centre of society through her activity, the Church can help society to elevate mankind’s dignity. In particular, GS addresses some specific issues where the “radiant ideals proclaimed by Christ” can illuminate humanity as it searches for answers (GS 46): marriage, culture, the economic and social life, the political community in the world and international peace. In all these themes GS considers how human dignity is elevated or threatened in modernity, while encouraging all persons to engage with the world for the good of society. Christians have a special role in the modern world: working alongside others to help society and grow as persons, overcoming selfishness and division in way that is only possible with God’s grace.

Gaudium et Spes

On the Church in the Modern World

VATICAN COUNCIL II



Gaudium et spes prompts us as Christians to grapple with our doubt and anxiety as we find ourselves absorbed in modern reality, where alienating technology and frenetic schedules often take the upper hand. It's easy to forget who we are, as individuals and even as a Church community. We can become slaves to our compulsions as we try to numb the discomfort of things turning out differently than we would like, whether being late because of traffic, adapting to unexpected family needs, facing an illness or seeing global turmoil in the news. It is no wonder that Gaudium et spes mentions the words 'free'/'freedom' fifty-three times!

The full text of Gaudium et spes can be found [here](#).

A Picture Worth A Thousand Words

By Marcio Ghigo, B.A. (Hons.) Theology student

Caravaggio's Divine Light: The Calling of Saint Matthew



Caravaggio's *The Calling of Saint Matthew* is a masterful representation of divine grace and human conversion, painted at a time when Caravaggio was pushing the boundaries of religious art. This piece of art, commissioned for the Contarelli Chapel in the Church of San Luigi dei Francesi in Rome, depicts Christ calling Matthew, a tax collector, to follow Him (Matthew 9:9–13). The composition is divided into light and darkness, as Christ's hand, lit by a shaft of holy light, reaches out to Matthew, who is seated in shadow and fully immersed in his task. This chiaroscuro not only emphasises divine action, but also symbolises the call to leave the darkness of sin and enter the light of Christ's grace. This is conveyed with a directness which makes it distinct from many other Mannerist paintings and increased the work's popularity.[1]

On this matter, St. John Chrysostom reflected that, "He did not call him after he had repented, but when he was still sitting at the receipt of custom, in the very act of sin." [2] Chrysostom emphasised that Jesus called Matthew not because he was righteous, but while he was still in

his sinful profession as a tax collector. He further highlighted that this choice reveals God's mercy, as Jesus reaches out not to the righteous, but to those in need of healing. Caravaggio's painting captures this moment—Matthew, surprised and uncertain, yet already being drawn out of his sinful life by Christ's gaze and extended hand.

Pope Benedict XVI also reflected on this episode, pointing out the radical nature of Matthew's conversion: "Matthew's conversion was immediate, total, and radical. He left behind his profession, his money, his lifestyle—everything."^[3] Matthew's quick decision to follow Christ, abandoning the corruption and loneliness of being a tax collector, symbolizes the complete renunciation required for true discipleship. Pope Benedict added that this act represents not just a rejection of wealth, but a turning away from a way of life incompatible with the values of God's Kingdom. Caravaggio depicts this instance of doubt in Matthew's expression, as he points to himself in surprise, before making the transformative commitment to follow Christ.

Caravaggio's dramatic use of light illuminates the divine call and mercy Christ offers to sinners, inviting them into redemption. This powerful portrayal reflects Pope Francis' insights when he discussed the scandal of Jesus' choice to call Matthew,^[4] a despised sinner in Jewish society. Jesus' act of communing with sinners, as shown in both the Gospel and Caravaggio's painting, was criticized by the Pharisees, who could not understand why a holy teacher would associate with the morally corrupt. Pope Francis emphasized that Jesus came to heal, not to condemn, citing His words, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (Mt 9:13). This message is visually reinforced in the painting, where Christ's hand reaches out in mercy,^[5] drawing Matthew—and all of us—into the light of His grace.

Caravaggio's *The Calling of Saint Matthew* is more than just a visual representation of a Biblical event; it is a sermon on God's grace and the transformative power of His call. The painting's realism, with its stark contrasts and emotional immediacy, pulls the viewer into the scene, inviting us to reflect on our own response to Christ's call. No one is beyond the reach of God's mercy, and true discipleship begins with an openness to His grace.

References

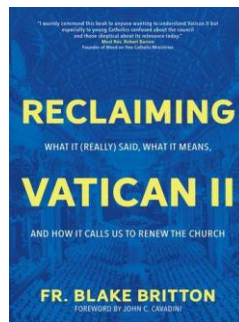
1. Gash, John. *Caravaggio*. London: Jupiter, 1980.
2. St. John Chrysostom, Homily 30 on the Gospel of Matthew.
3. Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, August 30, 2006.
4. Pope Francis, General Audience, April 13, 2016.
5. Lavin, Irving (1993). "Caravaggio's Calling of St. Matthew: The Identity of the Protagonist". *Past-Present: Essays on Historicism in Art from Donatello to Picasso*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p. 9

Reading Nook

By Tyrone Camilleri Galdes, B.A. (Hons.) Theology student

Reclaiming Vatican II

What It (Really) Said, What It Means, and How It Calls Us to Renew the Church by Fr. Blake Britton



In *Reclaiming Vatican II*, Fr. Blake Britton argues that the council was never about liberal or conservative agendas but rather a profound call to both tradition and renewal. He invites Catholics to transcend polarisation and embrace a balanced devotion to the Church Fathers, Scripture, and a truly transformative approach to engaging with the world. This [book](#) comes highly recommended for all young Catholics who are sceptical about the council's relevance sixty years later.

Just Thinking Aloud: Reflections on Studying Theology

By Robert Said Sarreo, B.A. Theology (Hons.) student

My name is Robert. I am 40 years old, and I am married with a 1-year-old daughter and another baby on the way. I work in the field of anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing. I am reading for a Bachelor's Degree in Theology (Hons) on a part-time basis. I just commenced my fourth year. Before I started this course, whenever I took any other course, my primary and only aim was to get good grades and successfully complete the course. I didn't bother much with the learning process. However, with this course, I've realized that the process is much more important than just passing exams and getting good grades. I'm not just referring to attending lectures and paying attention in class, but to something deeper. The process involves building relationships with classmates and lecturers, caring for and supporting each other throughout the year, ensuring that everyone is keeping up, sharing notes, and offering a helping hand so that everyone progresses to the next year. I've learned that these things have more value than personal achievement. With this course, I realized that if I don't change as a person, then I've wasted much of my time and achieved very little.

A Window into The Soul

The Spirituality of Chiara Lubich By Miriam Mallia, Graduate M.A. in Spirituality

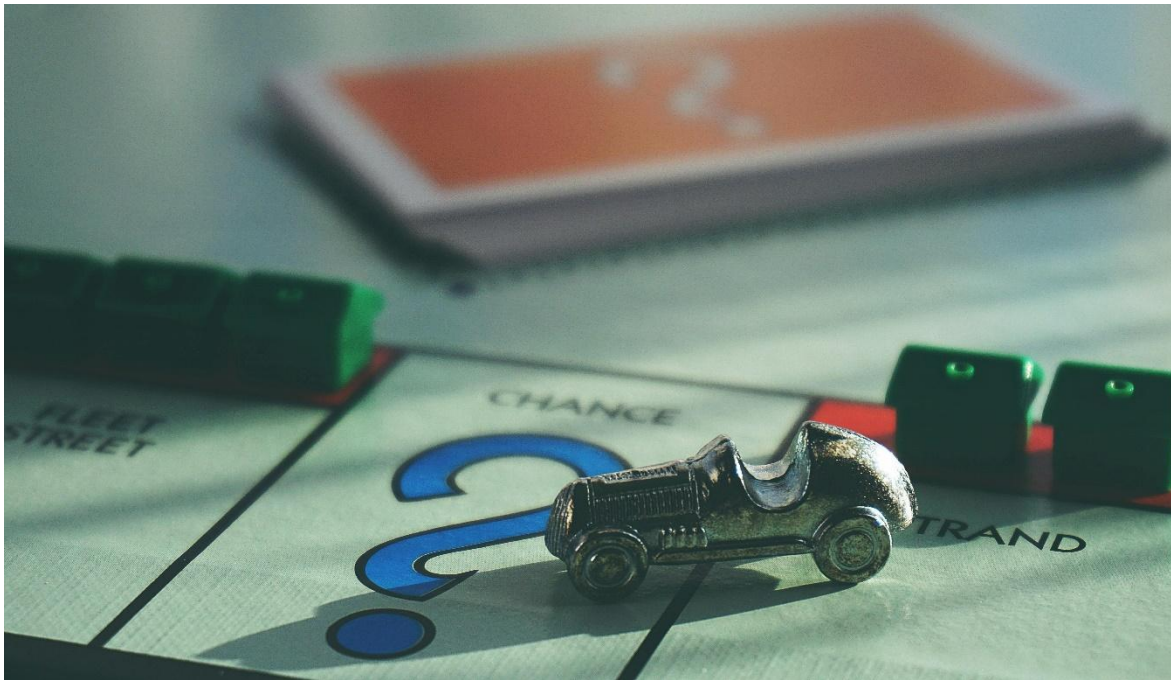


The Servant of God, Chiara Lubich, a lay woman, a primary teacher by profession, living in war-torn Trent in Italy, as the bombs destroyed houses, killed people and shattered dreams, felt a particular calling to follow God – a God who ‘loved her immensely’. She and a group of young women read and put the Gospel into practice in a simple but radical way. Each word seemed to bear new light. “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 13: 34-35) is every Christian’s calling of course, but in 1943, when Chiara was 23 years old, following such a calling was not so straightforward for lay people, especially women. It was innovative, not only to read the Gospel, but to live the Word, individually and together on a ‘Holy Journey’. The group grew into a Movement – the Focolare Movement, officially known as The Work of Mary.

Lubich felt a particular calling to ‘unity,’ to Jesus’ prayer “May they all be one” (John 17: 21-23). The key to empathising with others unto the point of ‘being one,’ Lubich understood, lies in loving Jesus crucified and forsaken. The spirituality of the movement is Marian, because Mary is the model ‘who gives Christ spiritually to the world in the diversity of its composition.’[1] The openness towards all human beings, be they Christians, of other religions, or of other convictions, nurtures dynamic relationships. Loving others, as Jesus loved us, while embracing diversity, forms us and our neighbour into who we really are -- “all brothers and sisters.”[2]

Lubich’s spirituality, together with other charisms, contributes to the Church’s own mission “as she is sent to all people...speaks to all men (and women)...encompasses all times.”[3] Since this spirituality is relational, it shares the Church’s vision to be synodal and to build “communion (that) indicates above all the heart’s contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us, whose light we must also be able to see shining on the faces of the brothers and sisters around us.”[4]

1. General Statutes of Work of Mary, Art.2.
- 2 Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti, Encyclical Letter (3 October 2020).
- 3 Catechism of the Catholic Church, n.868.
4. Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, Novo Millennio Ineunte, (6 January 2001), n. 43.



What is the symbol of the faith?

The word symbol derives from the Greek 'syn', together and 'ballein', to throw. A symbol is therefore something that collects things together. The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines the symbol of the faith as "a summary of the principal truths of the faith and therefore serves as the first and fundamental point of reference for catechesis" (CCC 188). The creed is a symbol of the faith, because it contains in it the main elements that Christians profess to believe. There are Christian creeds which are associated with early apostolic communities, such as the Athanasian creed, and those which are the result of a church council, such as those of Lateran and Trent. However, the Church gives two particular creeds a special place in its life: the Apostles' Creed, which was the creed of the first Roman Church, and the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (also known as the Nicene Creed), which was the result of two important Councils held in Nicene and Constantinople. The creed is one of the most important prayers of the Church, so much so that it is prayed in every Sunday Eucharistic liturgy. Want to know more? Click [here](#).

Do you have a question you would like us to answer? Write to ghst@um.edu.mt.



